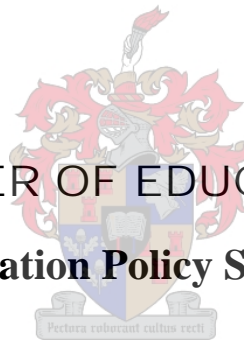


**CAN HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY FRAMEWORKS  
ENGENDER QUALITY HIGHER EDUCATION IN MALAWIAN  
UNIVERSITIES?**

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Thesis presented in partial fulfilment for the degree of

**MASTER OF EDUCATION  
(Education Policy Studies)**



**at**

**STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY**

**Supervisor: Professor Yusef Waghid**

**DECEMBER 2007**

## **DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

**SIGNATURE:.....**

**LESTER BRIAN SHAWA**

**DATE:.....**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Through policy document analyses and in-depth semi-structured interviews, this thesis examines the potential of higher education policy frameworks to engender quality university education in Malawian universities. Pertinent to the fast-growing higher education sector in Malawi is the connection between higher education policy frameworks and quality delivery of university education. Education policy frameworks in Malawi are mainly a response to the government's broad policy of poverty alleviation. Thus this thesis argues that quality university education ought to contribute to poverty alleviation especially by assisting the country to achieve its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to implement the initiatives of the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

To engender quality university education that could help to alleviate poverty in Malawi, this thesis through Habermasian critical inquiry proposes that quality ought to be the corollary of defensible higher education policy frameworks, policy documents need to delineate quality parameters, access to university education needs to be increased and, inevitably, discursive or deliberative higher education policy making ought to be given primacy.

**KEYWORDS:** higher education, higher education policy frameworks, poverty alleviation, quality university education, access, discursive higher education policy making.

## OPSOMMING

Aan die hand van beleidsdokumentontleding en diepgaande, semigestruktureerde onderhoude, ondersoek hierdie tesis die potensiaal van hoëronderwysbeleidsraamwerke om gehalte universiteitsonderrig in Malawiese universiteite teweeg te bring. Van besondere belang vir die snelgroeiende hoëronderwyssektor in Malawi is die verband tussen hoëronderwysbeleidsraamwerke en die lewering van gehalte universiteitsonderrig. Malawiese onderwysbeleidsraamwerke is hoofsaaklik 'n reaksie op die regering se omvattende armoedeverligtingsbeleid. Daarom voer hierdie tesis aan dat gehalte universiteitsonderrig tot armoedeverligting behoort by te dra, veral deur die land te help om sy millenniumontwikkelingsdoelwitte (MOD's) te bereik en die inisiatiewe van die Nuwe Vennootskap vir Afrika-ontwikkeling (NEPAD) in werking te stel.

Ten einde gehalte universiteitsonderrig teweeg te bring wat armoede in Malawi kan help verlig, doen hierdie tesis deur Habermasiese kritiese ondersoek aan die hand dat gehalte die uitvloeisel van verdedigbare hoëronderwysbeleidsraamwerke moet wees, dat beleidsdokumente gehaltegrense moet neerlê, dat toegang tot universiteitsonderrig verbeter moet word, en dat beredeneerde of oorwoë hoëronderwysbeleidbepaling onafwendbaar voorrang behoort te geniet.

**SLEUTELWOORDE:** hoër onderwys, hoëronderwysbeleidsraamwerke, armoedeverligting, gehalte universiteitsonderrig, toegang, beredeneerde hoëronderwysbeleidbepaling.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **CONTEXTUALISING HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY FRAMEWORKS AND QUALITY HIGHER EDUCATION IN MALAWIAN UNIVERSITIES**

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

General trends in Africa after colonialism show Africa's enthusiasm for creating universities capable of bringing about quality and relevant education. For example, the 1962 Tananarive Conference on the Development of Higher Education in Africa proposed an idealistic and ambitious mission in that universities were viewed as key instruments for national development (Council on Higher Education, 2001).

In Malawi the establishment of the University of Malawi in 1965 was vital for the production of human resources to replace the colonial personnel in the civil service, which then could, hopefully, contribute to the development of the country. However access to university education remains skewed with less than 0.5% of the population aged 18 to 23 attending tertiary education in recent years (Policy and Investment Framework, 2000:10) and there are no public policies put in place to regulate such things as quality assurance, program accreditation and implementation and institutional accreditation particularly of emerging private institutions (Hayward & Ncayiyana, 2006:5).

Although education is important for the development of any nation, it is the quality of education delivery that is paramount. Hence I argue that quality education ought to be the corollary of enabling defensible higher education policy frameworks.

Regrettably the World Bank and its partner organisations have for years placed great emphasis on basic education (Bloom, Canning & Chan, 2006:11). For Malawi the shift towards basic education by the World Bank has had adverse implications for the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training. With the insistence on basic education, the ministry lacked proper planning mechanisms envisaged for the delivery of quality higher education as it emphasised free primary education at the expense of higher education. Consequently, there is no body responsible for planning, reviews, advocacy or facilitation for higher education nationally (Hayward & Ncayiyana,

2006:5). To a great extent the emphasis on basic education undermined the Malawi Government's broad policy to alleviate poverty as it is illogical to think of alleviating poverty without quality university education.

Like many universities in Africa, higher education in Malawi faces challenges that (if not addressed) could potentially give rise to poor university education. My contention is that without defensible higher education policy frameworks, delineated quality parameters, increased access to university education and deliberative policy making in Malawi quality university education might be compromised and fail to assist the country to achieve its broad policy of poverty alleviation.

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND FOCUS**

In most African countries today, university education is expanding. Saint (1992:7) posits that to varying degrees, the universities of sub-Saharan Africa face four common problems: enrolments are often increasing faster than the capacity of universities to plan for and accommodate them, current patterns of higher education expenditure are unsustainable suggesting that the model of publicly supported residential universities is inequitable and financially inefficient, declining of education quality as a result of increased enrolments and/or reduced funding and a growing concern of the relevance of universities to national needs for both government and citizens.

These seem to be teething problems in Malawi as the number of students looking for university education is growing while public universities lack capacity to increase enrolment. Hayward and Ncayiyana (2006:4) argue that public higher education in Malawi can admit only about one fourth of potential applicants from the secondary school output of about 4000 school leavers who qualify for university admission. As a result, unregulated private higher institutions are rising in the country. For example, the Presbyterians have opened the University of Livingstonia in the northern region and the Catholics have opened the Catholic University of Malawi in the southern region. According to media reports, other religious groups such as the Seventh Day Adventists and the Muslim community are planning to open universities soon. Inevitably the growth of universities in countries necessarily calls for the growth of

enabling policy frameworks that can eventually sustain or ensure the quality of university education.

Hall and Thomas (2005:77) argue that the existing links between the higher education community and employers in Malawi are weak. They point out that there is evidence that higher education is not providing the quality of graduate that is necessary to meet the needs of a nation. In addition, they argue that at undergraduate level, curriculum development has not kept pace with changes in the environment and the demands now placed upon graduates. They note that the employment trend has now changed from an emphasis on public to private sector and that there is clear evidence that undergraduate programmes have failed to adapt to this change. Furthermore, they argue that recognition by employers of academic qualifications gained during higher education does not match graduates' expectations. They posit that what is lacking in Malawi are the mechanisms through which a variety of stakeholders, including employers, can arrive at or seek shared understandings about the proper and appropriate role of higher education (Hall & Thomas, 2005:77).

The concerns afore-mentioned prompted the Malawian government to organise a national education conference from 29 March to 1 April 2005 to rethink policies, strategies and best educational practices for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Most papers presented explicitly or implicitly centred on the decline of the quality of education in Malawi in general. The same sentiments have been persistent in the local as well as international media. Without question, the quality of education is a central issue in the whole education system in Malawi today.

In Malawi, higher education policy frameworks are generally fragmented into different documents. However, drawing on long-term strategies, such as the Vision 2020 document, the Policy and Investment Framework (PIF) for the education sector has outlined major policies and strategies for education, including higher education (PIF, 2000). Subsequently, the National Education Sector Plan (NESP) draws on Vision 2020, the PIF and the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) (NESP, 2006).

The PIF outlines the main educational challenges in Malawi as follows:

- **Access:** given that 0.5% of the population aged 18 to 23 is enrolled in the tertiary education sub sector, there is a clear need for expansion of this sector. The key goal is to increase the number of Malawians in tertiary education from 3,300 in 1997 to 12,000 by 2012.
- **Equity:** the major problem according to the PIF is that in the tertiary sub sector approximately 28% of students are female. The situation of female under representation in higher education institutions is compounded by their under representation in science and other professional degree programmes. The key goal is to increase the proportion of female students.
- **Quality:** the key goal is that tertiary institutions shall in collaboration with the government take appropriate measures to improve the motivation of teaching staff.
- **Relevance:** in addition to the provision of relevant physical and human resources, the quality of education provided by Malawi's educational institutions should be enhanced by a thoroughly revised curriculum. The key goal is that tertiary institutions shall review their teaching and research programmes to promote institutional responsiveness to the needs of Malawian society.
- **Management:** the key policy is that the government shall initiate appropriate legislation to promote the decentralisation of the public university administration. In this line the government proposed that by 2001 the University of Malawi Act be amended to enable the University of Malawi's colleges to obtain independent status. The government also envisaged that a National Commission for Higher Education be established by 2002 and also that there be an involvement of stakeholders in institutional governance.
- **Planning:** the major educational planning challenge relates to the strengthening of relevant capacities for the collection, analysis, storage and use of educational data. There is a clear need for establishing an effective



information retrieval system that can be used as a planning and policy tool for all levels of the education system. The key goal is that institutions shall take appropriate measures to strengthen their institutional capacities. In this they require strategic plans.

- **Finance:** the strong government commitment to the education sub sector is far from enough to accommodate the demands of significant expansion and improvement in the system. In view of the fact that available government resources can be stretched only so far, a major shortcoming of the current system of education finance is its overdependence on scarce government resources. The key goal is that tertiary institutions shall promote cost-effective use of available resources, diversify their revenue resources and introduce appropriate cost-sharing measures as a way of reducing the government's subvention on higher education.

It seems as if the notion of quality is relevant to all these policy recommendations and therefore directly or implicitly alludes to issues of access, equity, relevance, management, planning and finance. To engender quality university education in Malawi, therefore, these aspects need to be tackled simultaneously.

The NESP (2006:6) reiterates the overarching vision for education in Malawi as stated in the 2006 Malawi Growth and Development Strategy:

Education is a catalyst for socio-economic development, industrial growth and an instrument for empowering the poor, the weak and the voiceless. Education enhances group solidarity, national consciousness and tolerance of diversity. It facilitates the development of a culture of peace which is conducive and critical for socio-economic, political and industrial development. Hence education is critical and necessary for the economic and industrial growth and development goal.

The Malawi growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) is the overarching operational medium-term strategy for Malawi to attain the nation's Vision 2020 (MGDS:iii) The policy maintains a balance between the productive and social sectors of the economy in recognition to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that are also long-term development aspirations for Malawi (MGDS:iii).

According to the 2004 report on the development of education in Malawi compiled by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST)<sup>1</sup> and the Malawi Commission for UNESCO, before 1994 the government was guided by two education plans (EDPs) that preceded each other. The first EDP was formulated for the period of 1973–1980 and had the following objectives in mind:

- the fulfilment of specific needs of the labour market;
- the development of a school curriculum relevant to the socio-economic and environmental needs of the country; and
- the improvement of efficiency in the utilisation of existing facilities and resources and the achievement of a more equitable distribution of educational facilities and resources.

The second EDP from the period 1985–1995 addressed the following issues:

- the equalisation of educational opportunity;
- the promotion of efficiency in the system;
- the improvement of physical and human resources; and
- the judicious use of limited resources.

However, in Malawi, higher education policy frameworks are mostly in draft form. Moreover most policy documents are not yet revised and legislated. For example the Education Act currently in use was amended in 1962 (NESP, 2006). Furthermore as the PIF and NESP show, a legislative body to monitor higher education issues is not in place. My contention is that without defensible higher education policy frameworks, delineated quality parameters, increased access to university education and deliberative policy making in Malawi quality university education might be compromised and fail to assist the country to achieve its Millennium Development Goals and eventually the broad policy of poverty alleviation.

Given the afore-mentioned, the purpose of this study is to investigate the potential of higher education policy frameworks to engender quality education in Malawian universities.

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<sup>1</sup> The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT) was formally called the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST)

## **1.3 RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY**

### **1.3.1 Distinction between Method and Methodology**

The concepts of method and methodology are usually used interchangeably in research. However, these concepts are not necessarily the same. Harding (1987:2) argues that a research method is a technique for gathering evidence while a methodology is a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed. In this case methodology refers to metatheories. Higgs (1995:1) posits that metatheories determine the problems that are to be analysed as well as the adequacy of proposed solutions.

Crotty (1998:5) gives examples of methods such as questionnaires, interviews and observations and of metatheories such as positivism, interpretivism, critical theory, feminism and others.

This research is guided by the critical inquiry as methodology or metatheory. However, before explaining how critical inquiry informs this research, I shall start by clarifying positivist and interpretive inquiries and show how they are limited to inform this research.

#### **1.3.1.1 Positivist Inquiry**

Carr and Kemmis (1986:61) suggest that positivism assumes that valid knowledge can only be established by reference to that which is manifested in experience. They argue that positivism thus claims that knowledge can only be ascribed to that which is founded in reality as apprehended by the senses. Thus positivism holds that educational theories must conform to the Deductive Nomological model. For example, if (1) all metals expand when heated, when (2) a metal is heated, then (3) it will follow that the heated metal must expand (Carr & Kemmis, 1986:64). Given this pattern of measurement, Waghid (2002:43) argues that for positivist inquiry, there can be no rational argument about values. Education is not as easily measurable as positivism claims.

This paradigm is not appropriate for this research. First, in assuming that knowledge can only be scientifically proved, it ignores all other forms of knowing. In this case it would be impossible to think of any evaluation of education policies for these certainly lack scientific knowing as presented by positivism. Positivism therefore rejects reflexivity and is not ready to accommodate this type of research.

Second, since education policies are embedded in the culture of the people and benefit from values that are inherent, the rejection of values in knowing assumes that education happens in a vacuum where there are no cultural interaction and mutual understanding, which is not the case.

Broadfoot (2004:4) argues that policies practised in positivist inquiry may be used to commit the deception in which statistics are quite deliberately manipulated in order to portray something in the best possible light to achieve a certain ranking or to demonstrate success in relation to an imposed target. In the same vein, Waghid (2003:46) argues that education policy can be manipulated in third world countries to reflect the values of the dominant power or perhaps even the labour market conditions.

### **1.3.1.2 Interpretive Inquiry**

Interpretive inquiry seeks to replace the scientific notions of explanation, prediction and control with the interpretive notions of understanding, meaning and action (Carr & Kemmis, 1986:83).

According to Carr and Kemmis (1986:129), whereas it is important to grasp the meanings that educational practices have for those who perform them as suggested by interpretive inquiry, it is also important to realise that the self-understanding of individuals may be shaped by illusory beliefs that sustain irrational and contradictory forms of social life. Therefore any educational theory must provide ways of distinguishing ideologically distorted interpretations from those that are not and must also provide some view of how any distorted self-understanding is to be overcome.

Additionally, interpretive theory fails to recognise that many of the aims and purposes that teachers pursue are not the result of conscious choice so much as the constraints contained in a social structure over which they have little, if any, direct control. Educational theory then must be concerned with identifying and exposing those aspects of the existing social order that frustrate the pursuit of rational goals and must be able to offer theoretical accounts which make aware of how they may be eliminated or overcome (Carr & Kemmis, 1986:130).

Further, Carr and Kemmis (1986:130) argue that an educational theory cannot simply explain the source of problems that practitioners may face; rather, its purpose is to inform and guide the practices of educators by indicating the actions that they need to take if they are to overcome their problems and eliminate their difficulties.

Interpretive theory thus fails to go beyond mere interpretation of reality to effecting social change hence it is limited for this research. I shall now discuss critical inquiry which suits this research as it goes beyond mere interpretation of reality to proposing social change.

### **1.3.1.3 Critical Inquiry**

Nel (1995:127) explains the following tenets of critical inquiry: that it is opposed to any theory that excludes values from the concept of knowledge, strives for the emancipation of the individual, rejects the distinction between philosophy and sociology and does not regard theory and practice as opposites as it wishes to see a total transformation of society. Critical theory therefore aims to make transparent what was hidden and pave the way for change in practice towards praxis (Nel, 1995:129).

Thus, critical inquiry attempts to move the interpretive approach beyond its traditional concern with producing uncritical renderings of individuals' self-understanding so that the causes of distorted self-understanding can be clarified, explained and eliminated (Carr & Kemmis, 1986:137). Education policy makers ought to be aware of the dangers of enacting or formulating policies without analysing their own standpoints or situations, which may be informed by distortions within their society.

Further, critical inquiry focuses its attention on forms of social life that subjugate people and deny satisfactory and interesting lives to some while serving the interests of others (Carr & Kemmis, 1986:138). Education policies ought to concentrate on emancipatory roles.

More so, critical theory, especially in the Habermasian sense, seeks to locate the cause of the collective misunderstandings of social groups in society (Carr & Kemmis, 1986:138). Unless society becomes reflexive on *what it is* and *what it ought to be*, policies will always be colonising.

In general policies framed in this paradigm tend to be emancipatory in nature. Cowen (1996:166) argues that there is a need for the emancipatory and critical cultural project and that there is a need not only for policy advice but also for emancipatory critique of policy.

Thus critical inquiry shall be vital in understanding higher education policy making in Malawi and in assisting to offer pathways for restructuring the sector in order to bring about quality university education.

### **1.3.2 Methods**

The method employed is conceived as *questioning an educational practice or policy*. I shall examine higher education policy frameworks to find out whether they can engender quality education in Malawian universities. My theoretical points of departure entail examining and evaluating higher education policy frameworks and the concept of quality university education from the point of view of an education evaluator and policy analyst.

I constructed data through the following:

- (a) In-depth semi-structured interviews: 20 respondents were interviewed as detailed by the sampling technique below.
- (b) A review of reports and documents on university education in Malawi in general while posing the following questions:

1. What are stakeholders' perceptions of quality education in Malawian universities?
2. Is university education relevant to the needs of the country in Malawi?
3. What are the policy implications of stakeholders' perceptions of quality education in Malawian universities?
4. Can higher education policy frameworks engender quality higher education in Malawian universities?

### **1.3.2.1 Sampling Techniques**

All research, including qualitative research, involves sampling. This is because no study whether quantitative or qualitative or both can include everything (Punch, 1998:105). In this study a *deliberate* or *purposive sampling* was used to solicit information. The research targeted administrators and academics in the only two public universities in Malawi: The University of Malawi (UNIMA) and Mzuzu University (MZUNI). An officer in charge of higher education in the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT) was also targeted. These people were targeted because their work involves quality and policy issues in higher education in Malawi.

- **The University of Malawi**

The University of Malawi is a collegiate university comprising the following colleges: Chancellor College, Bunda College of Agriculture, Kamuzu College of Nursing, the Malawi Polytechnic and the College of Medicine. At the University of Malawi the interviews took place as follows:

a) Chancellor College

Chancellor College is the main campus of the University of Malawi with 23 departments under five faculties: Education, Humanities, Law, Science and Social Science. Four people were interviewed from this college: the college principal and the deans of the faculties of Humanities, Education and Social Science.

b) Bunda College of Agriculture

Bunda College of Agriculture specialises in agricultural sciences. It has three faculties: Agriculture, Development Studies and Environmental Sciences. Five persons were interviewed from this college: the college principal, the assistant registrar academics, the deans of the faculties of Agriculture and Development Studies and the deputy dean of the Faculty of Environmental Sciences.

c) Kamuzu College of Nursing

Kamuzu College of Nursing has one faculty that prepares graduate nursing and midwifery personnel. From this college two persons were interviewed: the college registrar and the dean of the faculty.

d) The Malawi Polytechnic

The Malawi Polytechnic focuses on science and technology, engineering and commerce. It has four faculties: Applied Sciences, Educational and Media Studies, Commerce and Engineering. From this college two persons were interviewed: the college principal and the dean of the Faculty of Engineering.

e) The College of Medicine

The College of Medicine has one faculty specialising in a wide range of courses in medicine. From this college one person was interviewed: the dean of Undergraduate Studies.

- **Mzuzu University**

Mzuzu University was established by an Act of Parliament in 1997 as Malawi's second national (public) university. It has three faculties: Education, Environmental Sciences and Information Science and Communication. From this university five persons were interviewed: the vice-chancellor, the senior assistant registrar and the deans of the faculties of Education, Environmental Sciences and Information Science and Communication.



- **The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training**

Finally, from the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training a desk officer concerned with higher education policy was interviewed.

Apart from interviews, major documents on higher education policy frameworks both at governmental and institutional levels were studied and analysed. These included the PIF, the MGDS and the NESP at governmental level as well as university development plans such as strategic plans, university acts, university mission statements, reports and other relevant documents.

### **1.3.3 Data Analysis**

Data analysis shall be twofold: analysis of policy documents and interview data.

Policy document analyses shall involve reading and analysing policy documents from the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT), general Malawi Government policies touching on higher education and university-level documents.

Interview data analysis shall involve transcribing in-depth semi-structured interviews for 20 respondents interviewed and tape recorded in a three-month (January to March) interval in Malawi. I shall employ the Miles and Huberman Framework for Qualitative Data Analysis to interpret data collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The framework shall enable me to construct knowledge through data available by using *abstraction*. Abstraction refers to the move from concrete terms to abstract levels in data analysis (Punch, 1998:208). Punch explains that in using this framework, analysis takes the form of data reduction, data display and drawing and verifying conclusions. Data reduction occurs continuously throughout the analysis. In the early stages it happens through *editing*, *segmenting* and *summarising* the data, in the middle stages through *coding* and *memoing* and associated activities such as *finding themes*, *clusters* and *patterns* and in the later stages through conceptualising and explaining. Finally, I shall draw and verify conclusions.

## 1.4 SUMMARY

This chapter gives a background to the study by contextualising higher education policy frameworks in Malawian universities and explaining the techniques used to collect data, data analysis and the methodology that informs the study.

## 1.5 PROGRAMME OF STUDY

**Chapter One** has provided a general background to the study. In **Chapter Two**, I shall analyse and clarify the concepts of quality, policy, policy frameworks and university and show how these can be understood within the context of the delivery of quality higher education in Malawi. In **Chapter Three**, I shall explain the historical perspectives in Malawian higher education, detailing and recounting the current state of university education. **Chapter Four** shall present the perceptions of quality by stakeholders and from policy documents in Malawi. I shall attempt to answer my research question in **Chapter Five**: Can Higher Education Policy Frameworks Engender Quality Higher Education in Malawian Universities? This chapter shall present a critique and offer pathways for restructuring higher education in Malawi to engender quality education. In **Chapter Six** I shall reflect on my journey through this thesis.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CONCEPTUALISING *QUALITY*, *POLICY*, *POLICY FRAMEWORKS* AND *UNIVERSITY* IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN MALAWI

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding chapter, I have presented the background to this study and outlined methods and methodology (metatheory) informing this research. Simultaneously, I have presented my contention that quality university education ought to be the corollary of defensible higher education policy frameworks. In this chapter, I am preoccupied with the concepts of *quality*, *policy*, *policy frameworks* and *university*. This is an attempt to show the interrelationship of these concepts in understanding the delivery of quality university education in Malawi. These notions are highly contested and when related to university education they are even more difficult to delineate.

More often than not, academics and university administrators have taken these concepts for granted. A case in point is when academics and university administrators jump into setting criteria for assessing quality. Often, they accept the word *quality* without question and assume that everybody understands it in the same way. Such assumptions implicitly impede efforts geared at delivering quality higher education in Malawi and elsewhere.

Largely, literature on quality has dwelt on quality assurance with little consideration of the conceptual analysis of the term. In Malawi where defensible higher education policy frameworks are inadequate, it is vital to start by engaging critically with the conceptual meanings of *quality* and related terms of *policy*, *policy frameworks* and *university*. In this way, I hope the country (Malawi) could discern realistic pathways for restructuring higher education in order to deliver quality education.

I shall now turn to discussing the nature of *quality*, *policy*, *policy frameworks* and *university* and relate them to the Malawian higher education.

## 2.2 THE CONCEPT OF QUALITY

Quality as a concept has certain abstract dimensions and it lends itself to so many different perspectives that meaningful dialogue is impossible unless the participants agree on a common approach (Mayhew, Patrick & Dean, 1990:25). Pirsig (1974:163-164) highlights this problem as follows:

Quality...you know what it is, yet you do not know what it is. But that's self contradictory. But some things are better than others, that is they have more quality. But when you try to say what quality is, apart from things that have it, it all goes poof! There's nothing to talk about. But if you can't say what quality is, how do you know what it is or how do you know it even exists? If no one knows what it is then for practical purpose it doesn't exist at all. But for all practical purposes it does really exist. What else are grades based on? Why else would people pay some fortunes for some things and throw others in the trash pile? Obviously some things are better than others...but what's "betterness"? So round and round you go, spinning mental wheels and nowhere finding any place to get traction. What the hell is Quality? What is it?

Harvey and Knight (1996:1) argue that we can no longer take quality for granted in higher education and presume we all know what we mean by quality higher education. Further, they posit that there is a need to reassess the taken-for-granted concepts of quality in the light of the changing rationale and purposes of higher education. It is vital to recognise that there have been changes within the concept of university that have concurrently affected the ways of talking about quality. Harvey and Knight (1996:1) further hold that quality appropriated by an autonomous, nonaccountable, elite university sector has been part of the defensive wall behind which the academy has been able to hide.

Vroeijenstijn (1995:13) posits that if we are talking of a concrete product we want to buy, for example a computer, it is easy to define quality: it has to do with what we expect it will do. There will be no misunderstanding. Nevertheless, when we consider education, we have trouble. Who is the client? Who is the consumer? When the government considers quality, it looks first at the pass/fail ratio, the dropouts and enrolment time. Further, he holds that quality in the government's eyes entails as many students as possible finishing the programme in the scheduled time with a

degree of an international standard with reduced costs while employers talking about quality will refer to the knowledge, skills and attitudes obtained by the graduate during the period of study. More so, for students, quality entails the contribution to individual development and the preparation for a position in society. Finally, he holds that the academic will define quality in terms of academic training, knowledge transfer and teaching and research.

The implication of what Vroeijenstijn posits is that university policy makers ought to be aware of the different perceptions of quality that stakeholders have so as in a way to capture all of them in their missions. For higher education in Malawi, a holistic approach to quality is vital to bring about quality education.

Harvey and Green (1993) posit five discrete but interrelated ways of thinking about quality. They view quality as *exceptional*, as *perfection* or *consistency*, as *fitness for purpose*, as *value for money* and as *transformation*. Relying on their categorisation, I shall attempt to show how different ways of thinking about quality might assist in evaluating quality higher education in Malawi. The choice of this categorisation however does not mean that these are the only ways of thinking about quality.

### **2.2.1 Quality as Exceptional**

This notion holds that quality is special. There are three variations of this notion: first, that quality is distinctive (traditional view), second, that quality embodies excellence (that is exceeding very high standards) and third, that quality means complying with a set of required (minimum) standards (Harvey & Green, 1993). All three dimensions have their own implications for higher education in Malawi.

The traditional concept of quality as exceptional holds that quality is *distinctive*, *something special* or *high class*. Quality is not determined through an assessment of what is provided but is based on an assumption, for example that the distinctiveness and inaccessibility of an Oxbridge education is of itself quality (Harvey & Knight, 1996:2). It is useless when it comes to assessing quality in education because it provides no definable means of determining quality (Harvey & Knight, 1996:2).

This view is inappropriate to Malawian higher education since it is difficult to determine the level of quality, hence it could be deceptive. This is better expressed by Harvey and Knight that quality appropriated by an autonomous, nonaccountable, elite university sector has been part of the defensive wall behind which the academy has been able to hide (Harvey and Knight, 1996:1).

The other concept pertaining to quality as exceptional is that it embodies *excellence* (exceeding high standards). Although this is similar to the traditional view, this concept identifies the constituents of excellence while at the same time ensuring that these are difficult to attain (Harvey & Knight, 1996:2–3). Extremely high standards are set that can only be achieved at great expense or with the use of scarce resources, thus putting them out of the reach of the majority of the population (Green, 1994).

The excellence view of quality (as expressed above) is unsuitable for Malawi for it is very expensive to sustain, especially in a developing country. The concept is very elitist thus problematic when it comes to the massification of education in the wake of an education that is supposed to be relevant to stakeholders. In Malawi, given that less than 0.5% of the population aged 18 to 23 attend tertiary education, it is important to expand higher education (Policy and Investment Framework, 2000:10).

The third concept pertaining to quality as exceptional is that quality is about *passing a set of quality checks* to achieve the standards set. If the standards are met, something is of quality. According to Harvey and Knight (1996:3) this final notion dilutes the notion of excellence as quality is attributed to all those items that come up to the minimum standards set by the manufacturer or monitoring body. Quality is thus the result of scientific quality control.

This notion is problematic for Malawian higher education since it is difficult to posit standards objectively. Standards are subjective and depend on the context in which universities find themselves. Thus it is possible to have lower standards set at a high-calibre university and vice versa. If this measure is to be followed, policy makers ought to be aware of the dangers of setting too low standards or unachievable ones. Thus higher education in Malawi ought to be more than passing a set of quality checks.

### **2.2.2 Quality as Perfection or Consistency**

Harvey and Green (1993) argue that quality as perfection sees quality as a consistent or flawless outcome that in a sense democratises the notion of quality and posits that if consistency can be achieved, quality can be attained by all. They argue that this approach demands conformity with specification or standards and that it has its origins in the notions of quality control in the manufacturing industry. Further that it suggests zero defects and doing things at the right time (quality culture). Thus there is no need to check the final output, for doing so is shifting responsibility from those involved at each stage.

This concept is problematic for higher education in Malawi since it assumes that higher education is about delivering specifications rigidly. Higher education is, arguably, about encouraging, *inter alia*, the analytic and critical development of the student (Harvey & Green, 1993). Harvey and Knight (1996:4) argue that although a quality culture is essential for an effective responsive quality improvement process, it is a culture of continuous improvement rather than a culture dedicated to producing a consistent product that is vital.

### **2.2.3 Quality as Fitness for Purpose**

Green (1994:15) argues that exponents of the quality as fitness for purpose approach argue that quality has no meaning except in relation to the purpose of the product or service. Quality is judged in terms of the extent to which a product or a service meets its stated purpose(s).

This notion is quite remote from the idea of quality as something special, distinctive, elitist, conferring status or difficult to attain. It is inclusive in that every product and service has the potential to fit its purpose and be a quality product or service. This approach, however, raises the issues of whose purpose and how fitness is assessed (Harvey & Knight, 1996).

According to Harvey and Knight (1996:5) fitness for purpose offers two alternatives for specifying the purpose. The first puts the onus on the customer and recognises the

customer as sovereign thus a quality product is one that conforms to customer-determined specifications. The second puts the onus on the provider. While providing a model for determining what the specification for a quality product or service should be, it is also developmental as it recognises that purposes may change over time, thus requiring re-evaluation of the appropriateness of the specification.

This notion of quality is appropriate to Malawian higher education, in that it encourages analysis of purposes of higher education and allows for re-evaluation of purposes to respond to current issues. Purposes of higher education are therefore not posited dogmatically.

In higher education this approach may be used to analyse quality at different levels. For example, if the purpose of higher education is to provide an appropriately educated work force, is the system as a whole providing the right number of graduates? Is a particular course providing the right balance of knowledge, skills and understanding (Harvey & Green, 1993)?

However, defining quality in higher education as meeting customer needs does not necessarily imply that the customer is always best placed to determine what quality is or whether it is present (Harvey & Green, 1993). It is vital to question whether students in higher education have the capacity to judge quality. Students may be able to identify their short-term needs but may not have enough knowledge and experience to know what they need in the long term (Harvey & Green, 1993).

Harvey and Green (1993) contend that fitness for purpose that puts the onus on universities or institutions seeks to see how quality is achieved as set out in the mission statements of the universities and that it is the basis for quality assurance.

Some educationists argue that fitness *for* purpose needs to be complemented by fitness *of* purpose. Coetzee and Roux (2001:210) assert that when the purpose, goal or vision of an education system or a school (as stated in its policy) accords with the primary task or purpose of the school (derived from its inherent nature), we can say that a school or a system exhibits fitness *of* purpose. They argue that an education system could be fit *for* its purpose when it functions in accordance with its nationally



stated goals and vision, but this does not automatically mean that it complies with the requirement of fitness *of* purpose. Lategan (1997) argues that in the notion of fitness *for* purpose the question is asked whether the objectives are achieved whilst in the notion of fitness *of* purpose the question is whether you have chosen the right objectives.

This concept, however, has more to offer to the Malawian higher education. Education policy makers ought to clearly and vividly delineate the purposes of higher education in Malawi in order to engender quality education. This, however, should take into consideration context and socioeconomic parameters and should be subject to review after defined periods. Essentially higher education in Malawi ought to consider complimenting fitness *for* purpose by fitness *of* purpose vividly in higher education policy documents.

#### **2.2.4 Quality as Value for Money**

Harvey and Green (1993) hold that quality as value for money sees quality in terms of return on investment. If the same outcome can be achieved at a lower cost or a better outcome can be achieved at the same cost, the customer has a quality product or service. They argue that value for money is a market view of quality related to accountability.

Moreover, this notion brings with it the issue of performance indicators and customer charters where performance indicators include student-staff ratios, indexes of revenue and capital resources, ratios of public to private funds, market share and examination results. While it is fashionable these days to talk of performance indicators in higher education, there is a general failure to define the purposes of performance indicators and the tendency to accord the most importance to those factors that can be measured most easily (Harvey & Green, 1993).

For Malawian higher education, this notion of quality has merit when one looks at accountability. Given poor resources, it is vital to have a responsible higher education system to deliver quality education. Nevertheless, it fails when the system

overemphasises measurable indicators that in most cases do not hinge on quality learning.

### **2.2.5 Quality as Transformation**

The concept of quality as transformation entails that there must be qualitative changes in the student. Education is seen as doing something to the student as opposed to something for the consumer. Education is a participative process and students are not products, customers, service users or clients but participants and education is an ongoing process of transformation of the participant (Harvey & Knight, 1995:7). Education as transformation includes the concepts of enhancing and empowering. Harvey and Knight (1995:8–9) mention four ways of empowering students: via student evaluation, guaranteeing students minimum standards of provision, giving students more control over their own learning and developing students' critical ability.

This notion captures the core business of the university or higher education. It is therefore applicable to Malawian higher education. This notion entails professional relationship between the academic and students. However, the biggest dilemma is the extent to which we can know that transformation has taken place in students. The universities then may need to find ways of assessing students' growth.

Mayhew *et al.* (1990:27) argue that from several quality considerations there are three generalisations that one can make: First, quality is a receding horizon in that there are no static, acceptable norms of performance. Second, in spite of theoretical considerations, if quality is to be improved, it must be defined with enough specificity so that its attributes are at least suggested if not clearly delineated. Third, quality improvement is inexorably bound up with assessment and feedback. The authors posit a working definition of quality in higher education as follows:

Quality undergraduate education consists of preparing learners through the use of words, numbers, and abstract concepts to understand, cope with, and positively influence the environment in which they find themselves (Mayhew *et al.*, 1990:29).

Quality in higher education, they argue, must be related to the central purposes of higher education and how these are translated into programmes and activities (Mayhew *et al.*, 1990:78). These arguments offer ways of thinking about quality and restructuring in Malawian higher education, thus they call for defensible higher education policy frameworks.

Further, they argue that parsimony, which is a realistic view of what higher education is and what professors and higher education institutions can really do, is a critical perspective for those concerned with improving quality in higher education (Mayhew *et al.*, 1990:78). In Malawian higher education as well as other Southern African countries where the brain drain has left behind inexperienced staff members, it would be helpful to consider the issue of parsimony sincerely.

In summary, this discussion on quality underscores the premise that underpins this research: that quality university education in Malawi ought to be the corollary of defensible higher education policy frameworks and the need for delineating parameters of quality (I have proposed quality as *fitness for* and *of purpose, value for money* and *transformation*) in the higher education policy frameworks. It is evident that quality needs to take into consideration several ways of thinking about it.

The different ways of thinking about quality lead to debates about *quality assurance* that are as complicated as those about quality.

## **2.3 QUALITY ASSURANCE**

Although quality is difficult to define, different ways of ensuring quality in higher education are suggested in literature. In this discussion, I intend to show how the higher education sector globally has employed quality assurance mechanisms. The idea is to critically learn from what is happening elsewhere in order to inform better practices for Malawian higher education.

Quality assurance can be defined as systematic management and assessment procedures adopted to ensure achievement of specified quality and to enable key

stakeholders to have confidence in the management of quality and the outcomes achieved (Harman, 1998:346).

Viewed in this way, quality assurance implies a collective process of maintaining the quality of educational process in the university. This exercise calls for a continuous process. Vlasceanu, Grunberg and Parlea (2004:47) argue that as a regulatory mechanism, quality assurance focuses on both accountability and improvement, providing information and judgement (not ranking) through an agreed-on and consistent process and well-established criteria.

### **2.3.1 Elements of Quality Assurance**

Quality assurance embodies several related terms such as *quality audit*, *quality assessment*, *peer review* and *accreditation*.

#### **2.3.1.1 Quality Audit**

Quality audit is the process of quality assessment by which an external body ensures that the institution or programme follows quality assurance procedures or that the overall (internal and external) quality assurance procedures of the system are adequate and are equally being carried out. Quality audit looks to the system for achieving good quality and not at the quality itself. Quality audit can be done to meet internal goals (internal audit) or external goals (external audit) and the result of the audit must be documented through an audit report (Vlasceanu, Grunberg & Parlea, 2004:49).

#### **2.3.1.2 Quality Assessment**

Quality assessment refers to every structured activity that leads to judgement of the quality of the teaching or learning process and/or research, whether self-assessment or assessment by external experts. There is no real difference between assessment, evaluation and review (Vroeijenstijn, 1995:xviii).

### **2.3.1.3 Peer Review**

Peer review is one of the pillars of external quality assessment by which a group of experts from outside the higher education institution will assess the faculty (Vroeijenstijn, 1995:xix).

### **2.3.1.4 Accreditation**

Accreditation is the process by which a government or private body evaluates the quality of a higher education institution as a whole or a specific educational programme in order to formally recognise it as having met certain predetermined minimum criteria or standards. The result of this process is usually the awarding of a status (a yes/no decision), of recognition and sometimes of a licence to operate within a time-limited validity. The process can imply initial and periodic self-study and evaluation by external peers. The accreditation process generally involves three steps with specific activities: first, a self-evaluation process conducted by the faculty, the administrators and the staff of the institution or academic programme, resulting in a report that takes as its reference the set of standards and criteria of the accrediting body; second, a study visit, conducted by a team of peers selected by the accrediting organisation, that reviews the evidence, visits the premises and interviews the academic and administrative staff, resulting in an assessment report, including a recommendation to the commission of the accrediting body; and third, examination by the commission of the evidence and recommendation on the basis of the given set of criteria concerning quality, resulting in a final judgment and the communication of the formal decision to the institution and other constituencies, if appropriate (Vlasceanu *et al.*, 2004:19).

### **2.3.2 Reasons for the Rise of External Quality Assurance Measures**

Reasons for the rise of external assurance mechanisms have been given by several authors such as Vroeijenstijn (1995), Barnett (1995) and Harman (1998). In summary I present different reasons for the rise of external quality assurance measures as given by the International Institute for Educational Planning (Martin & Stella, 2007:6-9) as follows:

### **2.3.2.1 The Expansion of Higher Education**

In the past few decades, there has been an increase in the social demand for higher education so that in many countries, national governments or authorities have found it more complicated or more challenging to ensure quality through traditional methods (Martin & Stella, 2007:6).

In Malawi, the number of students looking for higher education is high and this prompted the government to establish another public university in 1997 (PIF, 2000). The rise of private universities discussed earlier is an example of the response to the growth of demand for higher education in Malawi.

### **2.3.2.2 The Growth of Privatised Higher Education**

Many countries that in the past were committed to public-only systems of education now no longer have the financial capacity to respond to the demand for them. They have therefore adopted legislation that allows for the development of a private higher education sector. This has led to the growth in the private provision of higher education over the last decade (Martin & Stella, 2007:6). This situation has escalated the use of quality assurance mechanisms.

Currently, in Malawi private universities are operating without an elaborate regulatory system since this is yet to be instituted (NESP, 2006:11)

### **2.3.2.3 Higher Education Increasingly Perceived as a Private Good**

There is an increasing recognition of the private component of higher education. This is particularly true for professional degrees, which undeniably lead to greater benefits for the individual (Martin & Stella, 2007:6). This has globally called for a reassessment of quality assurance mechanisms.

In Malawi universities are beginning to align themselves to specialised degrees, as exemplified by Bunda College of Agriculture (constituent college of the University of

Malawi) that has started offering specialised degrees instead of general agricultural degrees. One respondent contended as follows:

At the moment there is direction towards specialised degrees. As a country, we are moving away from subsistence farming to commercialised farming. To support the move we have introduced specialised degrees in Agribusiness, Agriculture Economics, Agricultural Education and others in order to support what the country needs.

#### **2.3.2.4 Deregulation and Governments' Demand for Value for Money**

In many countries, governments have been reorganised according to the New Public Management model. This has led them to redefine their roles as public authorities. One of the emerging trends under this model is greater reliance on deregulation and decentralization of power from the government, or government agencies, to institutions. In many countries, deregulation is part of a broader reform of public organisations. Where this is the case, the predominant tools are the decentralisation of decision-making incentives for units and individual staff, negotiation of objectives and targets, output control and a funding system based on measures of output. These tools relate to notions such as self-regulation and autonomy (Martin & Stella, 2007:7).

The Policy and Investment Framework (2000) recommends the decentralisation of the University of Malawi. However, given the strict centralisation of this collegiate university, this will take time. It is hoped that decentralisation will enhance accountability and transparency.

#### **2.3.2.5 A Shift to the Market and Consumer Demand for Market Transparency**

New forms of government steering are frequently linked to a greater reliance on market mechanisms. Some countries have a strong tradition in this area while others have adopted these new procedures more recently. In highly diversified and market-oriented systems, such as in the United States of America (USA), the provision of information to consumers and the public at large through accreditation is a longstanding practice. Requests by students and parents for information on

institutions' performance have also become apparent in other regions that tend to be increasingly steered by market forces. Even in highly centralised higher education systems, there is a shift towards greater institutional autonomy (Martin & Stella, 2006:7).

Providing accreditation information to consumers is not yet in practice in Malawian higher education. But with the rise of private universities, regulation ought to become more pronounced and the need for accreditation information shall eventually become important.

#### **2.3.2.6 Globalisation**

Higher education systems are also increasingly affected by globalisation. Recent advances in regional integration processes and trade agreements as well as information and communication technology (ICT) have led to growing potential for the international movement of goods, capital and persons. This has had a significant effect on the structure, content and delivery of the higher education system worldwide. Indeed, trade agreements have led to an unprecedented level of mobility in certain professions. The globalisation of some professions and increased professional mobility create stronger pressure on countries and institutions to obtain qualifications recognised by the international labour market. Furthermore, there is a growing concern with the comparability of educational standards (Martin & Stella, 2007:8).

For Malawian higher education it remains vital to produce the quality of graduate that is comparable to international standards. This will demand greater regulation through defensible higher education policy frameworks.

#### **2.3.2.7 General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and Borderless Markets for Higher Education**

Martin and Stella (2007:8) further posit that a direct effect of globalisation on higher education is the continuous growth of transnational higher education and that this includes study programmes, sets of courses of study or educational services (including



distance education) in which learners come from a country different from that in which the awarding institution is based.

Exchange programmes are not very common in Malawian higher education; however, in order to enhance quality university education, it would be important for universities to open up exchange programmes to give opportunity to both students and staff to learn from peers.

#### **2.3.2.8 International Market for Quality Assurance Services**

According to Martin and Stella (2007:8–9), the movement towards the globalisation of educational services also includes quality assurance and accreditation services and that many of the private accreditation agencies operating at the national level, in particular those in professional areas of study such as management or engineering, offer their services to organisations located in other countries. For this reason, there have been attempts to build new organisations (for instance the Global Alliance for Transnational Education) that offer their services at an international level. However, the authors argue further that international providers of quality assurance services frequently impose their own values and standards that are not always in line with national perspectives. Eventually, they argue that, this puts additional pressure on national governments to establish their own structures that can be more easily geared to the preservation of national values and interests. Finally, they conclude that higher education institutions worldwide are thus faced with a new set of trends at both the national and international levels, which affects their higher education systems directly.

It would be realistic for Malawian higher education to avoid accepting imposed standards of quality assurance. The government and university community should provide quality assurance measures that could enhance quality university education for the country to alleviate poverty and achieve its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

## 2.4 MODELS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

In Malawi, there is currently a move, especially by the vice-chancellors of the two public universities (the University of Malawi and Mzuzu University), towards establishing quality assurance mechanisms in higher education (NESP, 2006). It suffices therefore to briefly show how other countries are tackling quality assurance mechanisms. This is an important activity for one of the major issues in enacting policies is policy borrowing. Policy borrowing, however, should be done with an understanding of the prevailing contexts so that it does not translate into blind policy borrowing. For the sake of understanding what is happening elsewhere in order to inform practice in Malawi, I present quality assurance models as discussed by Brennan and Shah (2000) and Harman (1998).

Brennan and Shah (2000:52) posit that the general model proposed by the European Union and others based on the review undertaken by Van Vught and Vroeijenstijn (1993) has four main elements:

- *A national body*: This body is endowed with responsibility for coordinating and setting out the procedures and methods to be used by institutions of higher education for the assurance of quality. Such a body should, according to the model, have legal status but be independent of the government.
- *Institutional self-evaluation*: Based on the procedures and methods set up by the national body, institutions should undertake regular self-evaluations and report to the coordinating body regularly.
- *External peer evaluation*: The institutional self-evaluation would form the basis for external peer evaluation. Such an evaluation should include discussions with academic and administrative staff, students and alumni.
- *A published report*: This report should set out the findings of the peer review visit and its main purpose should be to make recommendations to institutions in order to help them improve the quality of teaching and research.

Harman (1998:348–349) presents approaches to quality assurance management as follows:

**A. Responsible Agency/Unit**

(a) National or System Level

- A unit or section within a government agency
- Separate quality assurance agency established by the government
- Separate quality assurance agency established by the government but with considerable independence
- Agency established by a group or association of higher education institutions
- Agency established jointly by the government and higher education institutions

(b) Institutional Level

- Senior university management
- Academic board, academic committee or academic senate
- Specialist committee or board, set up by governing body, senior management or senior academic body

**B. Participation in Reviews and other Activities**

- Voluntary
- Compulsory
- Voluntary with some measure of pressure

**C. Methodologies of Review and Assessment**

- Self-study or self-evaluation
- Peer reviews by panels of experts, including the use of at least some external panel members and one or more site visits
- Analysis of statistical information and/or use of performance indicators
- Surveys of students, graduates, employers and professional bodies
- Testing the knowledge, skills and competencies of students

**D. Focus**

(a) National or System Level

- National reviews of disciplines  
*reviews of research only*

*reviews of teaching only*

*reviews of both teaching and research*

- Institutional evaluations

*reviews of teaching only*

*reviews of research only*

*reviews of quality assurance process*

*comprehensive reviews usually including teaching, research, management and quality assurance processes*

- National evaluations of the higher education system

#### **(b) Institutional Level**

- Reviews of departments, faculties and schools
- Reviews of courses and programmes
- Reviews of particular institutional functions or administrative and service units

#### **E. Purpose**

- Accountability
- Improvement and renewal
- Combination of purposes

#### **F. Reporting and Follow-up Activities**

- Report provided solely to the institution or unit concerned
- Report provided to the institution or unit but also published or made more widely available
- Formal reports provided to the minister, ministry, higher education funding or coordinating agency or at institutional level to the vice-chancellor or rector
- Public reporting
- Use of ranking and wide publication of the results of such ranking
- Performance indicators
- Accreditation or validation
- Improvement and renewal activities

Much as it is important to set quality assurance mechanisms, this does not yet assess quality. Quality education is still difficult to measure. Mechanisms only help one in

revealing the ability or inability of higher education systems in coping with quality. Barnett (1995:18–19 & 20–21) warns that the quality debate has sidelined significant concepts of higher education. He mentions that the debate on quality has centred on the following:

- Higher education as the production of qualified personnel
- Higher education as a training for research careers
- Higher education as the efficient management of teaching provision
- Higher education as a matter of extending life chances

The debate should, however, have centred on the following:

- The development of individual students' autonomy, with students acquiring intellectual integrity and the capacity to be their own persons
- Higher education as the formation of general intellectual abilities and perspectives
- The enhancement of the individual student's personal character
- The developing of competence to participate in critical commentary on the host society

Quality university education ought to be holistic for quality education really depends on the professional activities of academics and individual students' engagement with the learning process. This, of course, needs to be supported by enabling defensible policy frameworks.

## **2.5 THE CONCEPT OF POLICY**

Like the notion of quality, the concept of policy is also elusive. However, to meaningfully engage with the current situation of higher education in Malawi it is vital to sketch the different ways of thinking about policy and policy making. This discussion aims at showing how different ways of thinking about policy can assist in the restructuring of higher education in Malawi in order to deliver quality education.

Haddad (1995:17–18) proposes a functional definition of policy: an explicit or implicit single decision or group of decisions that may set out directives for guiding

future decisions, initiate or retard action or guide implementation of previous decisions.

Haddad (1995:18) further argues that policies differ in terms of their scope, complexity, decision environment, range of choices and decision criteria. For example, issue-specific policies are short-term decisions; a programme policy is concerned with the design of a programme in a particular area while a multi-programme policy decision deals with competing programme areas. Strategic decisions deal with large-scale policies and broad resource allocations.

Higher education policy making is usually strategic with different people or groups expected to be involved in implementation. It therefore demands proper mechanisms or defensible policy frameworks in order to be effective. Since education policy is chiefly a public activity, it is vital to briefly sketch the meaning of public policy.

Dye (1987:2) argues that public policy is whatever governments choose to do or not to do. This conception provided by Dye implies that the agent of public policy making is the government. Although the activities of nongovernmental actors may and certainly do influence what governments do, the decisions or activities of such groups do not in themselves constitute public policy (Howlett & Ramesh, 1995:5). Dye further implies that public policies involve a fundamental choice on the part of governments to do something or to do nothing.

It would perhaps be less meaningful to agree totally with Dye's definition for it assumes that policy making is a matter of choice. Policy making is certainly more than just explicit choices from a wide range of offerings. Policy making must also be informed by a critical study of society to bring about emancipatory roles.

Anderson (1979:3) proposes that policy refers to a purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or a matter of concern. Public policies are those policies developed by governmental bodies and officials. In this definition, we are offered the idea that policies are laid down by more actors than just the government. Education policies are a result of negotiation and that sometimes

advocacy plays a more important role in influencing the government's education policy making.

Birkland (2005:18) argues that Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram provide a more extensive definition of policy that conceives of policies as revealed through texts, practices, symbols and discourses that define and deliver values including goods and services as well as regulations, income, status and other positively and negatively valued attributes.

Trowler (1998:48–49) mentions that education policy is often thought of as a *thing*: a statement of some sort, usually written down in a policy document. Viewed in this way, education policy could be defined as follows:

A specification of principles and actions, related to educational issues, which are followed or should be followed and which are designed to bring about desired goals.

In this sense, policy is a piece of paper, a statement of intentions or practice as it is perceived by policy makers or as they would like it to be. Trowler argues that this view of policy is very limited. It is better to see policy as a *process*, something that is dynamic rather than static. This dynamism comes from a number of sources:

- There is usually a conflict between those who make policy and those who put policy into practice about what the important issues are and about the desired goals.
- Interpreting policy is an active process: policies are almost always subject to multiple interpretations, depending upon the standpoints of the people doing the interpretive work.
- The practice of policy on the ground is extremely complex, both that being described by policy and that intended to put policy into effect.

Berkhout and Wielemans (1999) argue that the conceptualisation of education policy in a complex, dynamic and diverse socio-political system is more problematic than merely describing it as the set of executive, administrative, deliberative and adjudicative institutions and/or official texts that direct education at various

hierarchical levels of government. They note that the enduring concepts in policy processes are power, authority and value allocation.

Education policy therefore is not just an easy and direct concept. It is certainly shaped by several forces. There is a need to understand the problems that Malawi faces in order to channel deliberative policy making.

### **2.5.1 Models of Public Policy Making**

Models help in trying to understand how policy decisions can be arrived at. As already argued, education is a public policy process shaped by several other parameters. In this section, I present selected models of public policy making in a bid to inform different ways of achieving defensible higher education policy frameworks which, in turn, can enhance delivery of quality higher education in Malawi. Considering that these models are not necessarily country specific, I briefly describe them and show or suggest which ones are appropriate to higher education policy making in Malawi.

#### **2.5.1.1 The Rational Actor Model**

The rational actor model is rational in the sense that it prescribes procedures for decision making that will lead to the choice of the most efficient means of achieving public policy (Howlett & Ramesh, 1995:140).

Dye (1987:32) posits that rationalism involves the calculation of all social, political and economic values sacrificed or achieved by a public policy, not just those that can be measured in dollars. Further, he argues that to select a rational policy, policy makers must know all the society's value preferences and their relative weights, know all the policy alternatives available, know all the consequences of each policy alternative, calculate the ratio of benefits to costs for each policy alternative and select the most efficient policy alternative.



This model is not applicable in making higher education policies in Malawi for it is too idealistic and time consuming and demands a great deal of resources and expertise to implement.

#### **2.5.1.2 The Incremental Model**

This model views public policy as a continuum of past government activities with only incremental modifications (Dye, 1987:36). The theory was developed after doubts about the practicality and even usefulness of the rational model (Howlett & Ramesh, 1995:141). This theory is attributed to Charles Lindblom, who summarised the model as consisting of the following tenets:

- Limitation of analysis to a few somewhat familiar policy alternatives, differing only marginally from the status quo
- An intertwining of the analysis of policy goals and other values with the empirical aspects of the problem
- A greater analytical preoccupation with ills to be remedied than positive goals to be sought
- A sequence of trials, errors and revised trials
- Analysis that explores only some, not all, of the important possible consequences of a considered alternative
- Fragmentation of analytical work to many (partisan) participants in policy making (each attending to his or her piece of the overall problem domain) (Howlett & Ramesh, 1995:141)

This model is problematic in making higher education policies in Malawi for it limits, innovation, creativity and deliberation as it takes past government activities as precondition for policy making.

#### **2.5.1.3 The Elite Model**

The elite model sees policy as elite preference. In this sense, public policy making is viewed as the preferences and values of the governing elite. The elite theory suggests that people are apathetic and ill-informed about policy, that elites actually shape mass opinion on policy questions more than masses shape elite opinion (Dye, 1987:29).

In this case policies are highly top-down. This model assumes the following three ideas: First, change and innovation in public policy come about as a result of redefinitions by elites of their own values. Elitism does not mean that change will be against mass welfare but only that the responsibility for mass welfare rests upon the shoulders of elites, not masses. Second, elitism views masses as largely passive, apathetic and ill-informed. Third, elitism also asserts that elites share in a consensus about fundamental norms underlying the social system (Dye, 1987:30–31).

The model is not suitable for making higher education policies in Malawi in that higher education policy requires several people or groups for implementation. Moreover, in a set-up such as Malawi and other developing countries, the chances for the ruling elite to make policies that lack equity are very high.

#### **2.5.1.4 The Pluralist Model**

Pluralism is based on the assumption of the primacy of interest groups in the political process. There are different forms of pluralism, but the major defect remains their excessive concentration on the role of interest groups and their neglect of other equally important factors in the policy making process (Howlett & Ramesh, 1995:35).

Higher education policy making in Malawi is not an issue of what interested groups want. It is about education planning for all Malawians and not particular groups. As such, this model is inappropriate.

#### **2.5.1.5 The Institutional Model**

The institutional model of policy making takes its course towards the relationship between public policy and governmental institutions. Policy is conceived of as an outcome of political institutions. Dye (1987:21) argues that public policy demands adoption, implementation and enforcement by some governmental institutions for it to become public policy.

This is the most appropriate model for higher education policy making in Malawi. However, the model could be complemented by the critical theory for better policy making in higher education in Malawi. In short, higher education policy making needs to be deliberative in order to engender quality university education.

## **2.6 HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY FRAMEWORKS**

Whereas the models help in conceptualising ways of thinking about education and/or public policy making and thus inform in terms of how a country ought to go about enacting policies, *policy frameworks* are specific work mechanisms designed to be used in achieving certain goals.

Higher education policy frameworks are thus mechanisms put in place in order to achieve a certain goal in higher education. In this section, for the sake of learning purposes in restructuring higher education in Malawi, the following section presents higher education policy frameworks currently in use in South Africa. At the moment the aim is to see how education policy is laid down elsewhere before assessing the situation in Malawi.

### **2.6.1 Higher Education Policy Frameworks in South Africa**

South Africa has taken several measures to transform its higher education from one characterised by apartheid (apartness) to one that respects democratic values. It has founded different regulatory frameworks that mainly hinge on enhancing quality higher education.

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act was passed in 1995. According to the Higher Education Quality Committee Founding Document of the Council on Higher Education (2004:4) the functions of the SAQA are to

- (a) (i) oversee the development of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF);
- (ii) formulate and publish policies and criteria – the registration of bodies responsible for establishing educational and training standards or qualifications and the accreditation of bodies responsible for monitoring

and auditing achievements in terms of such standards and qualifications;  
and

- (b) oversee the implementation of the NQF, including
  - (i) the registration or accreditation of bodies mentioned above;
  - (ii) the registration of national standards and qualifications;
  - (iii) implementation of steps to ensure compliance with provisions for accreditation; and
  - (iv) implementation of steps to ensure that standards and registered qualifications are internationally comparable.

The objectives of the NQF are as follows:

- (a) Create an integrated national framework for learning achievements.
- (b) Facilitate access to and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths.
- (c) Enhance the quality of education and training.
- (d) Accelerate the redress of the past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities.
- (e) Contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large (Founding document, 2004:4).

#### **2.6.1.1 The Council on Higher Education (CHE)**

The South African Council on Higher Education (CHE) was established as an independent statutory body in 1998, in terms of the Higher Education Act No 101 of 1997. The Higher Education Act and the Education White Paper 3 of 1997, A Programme for Transformation of Higher Education, established the responsibilities of the CHE as advising the Minister of Education on all matters relating to higher education policy issues and assuming executive responsibility for quality assurance within higher education and training ([www.che.ac.za](http://www.che.ac.za)).

The CHE defines its mission as contributing to the development of a higher education system characterised by quality and excellence, equity, responsiveness to economic and social development needs and effective and efficient provision, governance and management. It seeks to make this contribution

- by providing informed, considered, independent and strategic advice on higher education policy to the Minister of Education;
- through the quality assurance activities of its subcommittee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC);
- through publication and broad dissemination of information; and
- through conferences and workshops on HE and other focussed activities ([www.che.ac.za](http://www.che.ac.za)).

It has 13 members comprising academics, academic administrators, student unions and others.

The main directorate of the CHE is the Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate, which has the responsibility of monitoring and evaluating policy achievements in higher education. It has several publications on higher education in South Africa.

According to the Higher Education Quality Committee Founding Document (2004:3) following on recommendations of the White Paper on higher education, the Higher Education Act of 1997 makes provision for the CHE to establish a permanent subcommittee, the HEQC, with the mandate to do the following:

- Promote quality assurance in higher education.
- Audit the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions.
- Accredite programmes of higher education.

At the moment the HEQC is developing a quality assurance framework and criteria based on quality as fitness of purpose based on the national goals, priorities and targets; fitness for purpose in relation to a specified mission within a national framework that encompass differentiation and diversity; value for money judged in relation to the full range of higher education purposes set out in the White Paper; and transformation in the sense of enhancing the capabilities of individual learners for personal development as well as the requirements of social development and economic and employment growth (Founding document, 2004:9).

The Higher Education Act stipulates that the CHE and the HEQC must comply with the policies and criteria formulated by the SAQA (in terms of Act No 58 of 1995). It

also provides for the delegation of any quality promotion and quality assurance functions by the HEQC to other appropriate bodies, with the concurrence of the CHE (Founding Document, 2004:3).

The HEQC is required to operate within the requirements of the SAQA in its mandate of facilitating the development of the NQF. The HEQC has three directorates:

The Directorate for Quality Promotion and Capacity with the following responsibilities:

- *Quality promotion*: the development of a programme of activities to institutionalise a quality culture in higher education and a commitment to continuous quality improvement.
- *Capacity development*: the development and implementation of initiatives to build and strengthen the capacity for high-quality provision at institutional, learning programme and individual levels ([www.che.ac.za/heqc/heqc.php](http://www.che.ac.za/heqc/heqc.php)).

The Institutional Audit Directorate is responsible for the HEQC core function of the quality audit of the effectiveness of the arrangements for the management of quality in the three core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement of all public providers and the qualifying private providers of higher education. The HEQC supports the principle that the primary responsibility for the quality of provisions rests with higher education institutions themselves ([www.che.ac.za/heqc/heqc.php](http://www.che.ac.za/heqc/heqc.php)).

The Directorate for National Reviews is responsible for national reviews that are a specialised type of accreditation exercise focusing on existing learning programmes in a particular discipline or subject area. This reaccreditation is carried out using specific criteria developed by specialists and peers and commented on by stakeholders and institutions offering those programmes ([www.che.ac.za/heqc/heqc.php](http://www.che.ac.za/heqc/heqc.php)).

National reviews have three components:

- Institutions submit their self-evaluation on the extent to which programmes meet the agreed-upon criteria and minimum standards.

- A panel of peers and experts visits the institution and interviews representatives from management, academic staff, students and alumni. Taking into account the self-evaluation and the result of the visit to the institution, the panel makes recommendations in relation to the accreditation status of each programme to a Specialist Accreditation Committee. This committee submits its recommendations to the HEQC Board.
- An analytical report of results of the reaccreditation process provides a quantitative, qualitative and contextual analysis of the programmes that were submitted for reaccreditation. The analysis follows lines of enquiry derived from the results of the reaccreditation process and looks into issues of quality of provision, taking into account local and international developments in the specific discipline or programme ([www.che.ac.za/heqc/heqc.php](http://www.che.ac.za/heqc/heqc.php))

#### **2.6.1.2 Quality Assurance Mechanisms at University Level**

Each university has established a quality assurance unit with different nomenclature in different universities that sums up to the academic planning and quality assurance unit. Generally these units are mandated to facilitate and support programs affairs at institutional level and facilitate the quality assurance management systems of the universities ([www.sun.ac.za/abvg](http://www.sun.ac.za/abvg))

In Malawi, the higher education needs such defensible policy frameworks.

### **2.7 THE CONCEPT OF UNIVERSITY**

Although I have already implicitly alluded to the idea of university in the preceding chapters, here I shall briefly show how this idea has changed from the early conceptualisations. At this point the issue to unravel is that the perceptions of university have changed or are changing and so are the purposes.

Brubacher (1982:12-13) argues that in the 20th century, epistemological (liberal) considerations and political (vocational) ones have been two principal philosophies of higher education through which the university has established its credentials. He argues that those stressing epistemology in their philosophy of higher education tend

to pursue knowledge as an end in itself while those who look at it with political eyes stress a higher education for solving problems in society.

It is worth noting the historicity of university that has affected the way a university is conceived of now. On liberal education, Allen (1988:17) argues that whatever the curriculum, the purpose of liberal education is to train the mind.

Newman (1965:82) in support of higher education for the mind writes the following in relation to students:

A habit of mind is formed which lasts through life, of which the attributes are freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation, and wisdom; or what in a former discourse I have ventured to call philosophical habit. This then I would assign as the special fruit of the education furnished at a university, as contrasted with other places of teaching or modes of teaching. This is the main purpose of a university in its treatment of students.

In relation to learning, Newman (1965:104) further asserts the following:

I say a university, taken in its bare idea, and before we view it as an instrument of the church, has this objective and this mission; it contemplates neither moral impression nor mechanical production, it professes to exercise the mind neither in art nor duty; its function is intellectual culture: here it may leave its scholars, and it has done its work when it has done as much as this. It educates the intellect to reason well in all matters, to reach out towards truth, and to grasp it.

Newman was strongly opposed to the idea that research is an essential activity for a university (Allen, 1988:17). Gasset supported Newman in the idea that the research function should be eliminated from the university, arguing that research and teaching were not necessarily or ideally linked (Allen, 1988:18). Although Newman did not confine his curriculum, in Greco-Roman times the liberal arts were a *trivium* of grammar, logic and rhetoric and a *quadrivium* of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music (Allen, 1988:17).



Not everyone was fit for liberal education. Liberal education as the prerogative of a limited upper class in a dichotomous society was matched and reinforced by a mind-body dualism, and as the upper ruled the lower, so the mind ruled the body (Brubacher, 1982:76). The notion of educating a person to live in some particular time or place, to adjust him or her to some particular environment, is therefore foreign to a true conception of liberal education (Brubacher, 1982:76).

Jaspers in his book *The Idea of the University*, which was first published in 1923 and revised in 1946, strongly argues that research is central to the university (Allen, 1988:19). Further, he argues that a university is simultaneously a professional school, a cultural centre and a research institute (Allen, 1988:19). Jaspers contends that no one who is not carrying out research can fully educate students at a university (Allen, 1988:19).

The adoption of a research mission challenged the supremacy of the historic teaching mission and eventually profoundly transformed the interior culture of universities, the nature of knowledge production and dissemination, the criteria for measuring academic success, models of organisation and governance, funding and physical appearance (Rothblatt, 2000). Rothblatt (2000) argues that the modern university can be defined in terms of research, differentiation by function and mission, quality control and government involvement.

Brubacher (1982:83) asserts that it is vital to note that although many people see the conflict between vocational and liberal education as an antithesis between science and the humanities, the antithesis is false in that even science is informed by theory as it puts theory to the test. Science must therefore be granted an indisputable intellectual content and hence would be entitled to be a respected part of liberal education.

Brubacher (1982:87) further posits that liberal education has left its mark on history especially when students came from a limited leisure class, as in traditional oligarchy, classical liberal education was satisfactory but that today, when most people work, as in democracy, higher education will lead to maladjustment if it does not include some specialized training for earning a living.

A university in my view should combine a wide range of missions that should be carefully debated and arrived at by stakeholders. For countries such as Malawi, owing to their poor socioeconomic status, I argue for a university education that balances liberal ideas as well as vocational orientation. In other words, I propose a university education that is embodied in praxis, not in separation of theory and practice. A university must be fully engaged in teaching as well as research and must take care of the need of society simultaneously.

## **2.8 SUMMARY**

In this chapter, I have conceptually analysed the concepts of *quality*, *policy*, *policy frameworks* and *university* and attempted to show how they relate to higher education, especially within the Malawian context. I have argued that it is vital to understand these concepts and the related concept of *quality assurance* in order to discern realistic pathways in restructuring higher education in Malawi to deliver quality higher education.

I have argued for delineated policy parameters (fitness *for* and *of* purpose, value for money and transformation); for institutional model of policy making that enshrines deliberation and for a university that is embodied in praxis (balancing between liberal ideas and vocational orientation). In the following chapter, I shall explain the historical perspectives in Malawian higher education, detailing and recounting the current state of quality university education.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN MALAWI**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the preceding chapters I have argued for the need for defensible higher education policy frameworks and for a holistic approach to achieving quality university education in Malawi, guided by quality as *fitness for* and *of purpose, value for money* and *transformation*.

In this chapter, I shall discuss the establishment of the two public universities as well as their mission statements, objectives, governance systems, enrolment and funding levels. The argument is that these aspects too ought to contribute to quality university education in Malawi.

From 1965 university education in Malawi was offered by one university, the University of Malawi (UNIMA). It was only in 1997 that a new public university, Mzuzu University, was opened (Mzuzu University Strategic Plan 2006-2010:1).

#### **3.2 THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI**

Malawi, formally Nyasaland, was under British rule from 1891 to 1964 (Malawi DHS EdData Survey, 2002:1). Consequently it was part of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, comprising the present-day Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia) and the present-day Zambia (Northern Rhodesia), which came into being in 1953 (Kitchen, 1962:215).

Being part of the federation, Malawi was expected to benefit from higher education developments in Southern Rhodesia. Here the initiative for the establishment of the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was taken by the European settlers of Rhodesia who wanted higher education for their children locally and more cheaply, while doing everything to limit facilities for education, especially secondary education, to the Africans (Ayayi, Goma & Johnson, 1996:65). The college was

originally incorporated under the Southern Rhodesia University Charter and Inaugural Board (Private Act, 1952) and was intended to serve the higher educational needs of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (Tananarive Higher Education Report, 1962:296).

According to Kitchen (1962:228), the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was incorporated as an affiliate of the University of London by the Royal Charter in 1955. However, this arrangement brought problems for Malawian students. As an affiliate of the University of London, entry qualifications were too high for most Malawians at that time; as a result, very few of them were admitted to the university. Moreover, later, when Nyasaland (Malawi) broke away from the federation and became an independent country in 1964, the ruling Malawi Congress Party led by the former president Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda discouraged students from attending the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland on the grounds that it was used to publicise the federation.

Eventually on October 30, 1964, the Malawian parliament passed the University of Malawi (Provisional Council) Act and the chancellor, Dr Ian Michael, took up the post on November 8, 1964 (Marius, 1973:100). Subsequently, the Carnegie Corporation gave a grant and the British Government provided funds to begin university operations at Chichiri. Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda (then prime minister) officially opened the University of Malawi at Chichiri campus on October 6, 1965 (Marius, 1973:100). Envisaging a practical university, the prime minister asserted the following:

This is one of the greatest days in the history of this country ...I am not a scholar, not even a teacher. I am a simple physician, a general practitioner, not a consultant, not a specialist. I am not going to introduce a new theory or expand a new philosophy. Most of you who know me realize that I am a practical man and not a theoretical one (Marius, 1973:104).

With the Malawi Polytechnic opening in 1966 and Bunda College becoming a constituent college in 1967, the University of Malawi officially took up constituent colleges on January 1, 1967 (Marius, 1973:134). Thus as of 1967 the constituent

colleges of the University of Malawi were as follows: Bunda College of Agriculture in Lilongwe and the Institute for Public Administration, the Malawi Polytechnic and Soche Hill Teachers College (formerly called Chancellor College) at the Chichiri campus in Blantyre. The Chichiri campus offered the usual range of degree courses in arts, science and social science (Malawi Education Sector Survey, 1978).

In 1973, the university merged three of the colleges (Chancellor, Soche Hill and the Institute of Public Administration) into the Chancellor College and moved to Zomba. With these changes the constituent colleges were Chancellor College in Zomba, Bunda College of Agriculture in Lilongwe and the Malawi Polytechnic in Blantyre. Later, Kamuzu College of Nursing was added as a constituent college of the University of Malawi in 1979 in Lilongwe and the College of Medicine was opened in 1991 in Blantyre (Dubbey, 1994:33). These five colleges currently constitute the University of Malawi.

According to the Malawi Education Sector Survey (1978) the University of Malawi model emerged in the early 1960s, partly out of economic considerations and partly as a result of historical exigencies. On economic grounds, it would have been unrealistic to launch different types of tertiary institution separately. It was a realistic policy both on economic and educational grounds to entrust the university with the responsibility for almost all tertiary education in the country. There were also historical considerations to take into account. At the time the university was being set up under a single administration, there were already a number of postsecondary institutions.

Apart from colleges, the University of Malawi has centres that include the Centre for Social Research, the Centre for Language Studies and the Centre for Educational Research (Hayward & Ncayiyana, 2006:3).

### **3.2.1 The Mission Statement of the University of Malawi**

The mission statement of the University of Malawi is as follows:

To advance knowledge, promote wisdom and understanding and provide services by engaging in teaching and research and by facilitating the

dissemination, promotion, and preservation of learning responsive to the needs of Malawi and the world (University of Malawi Strategic Plan, 2005-2010).

### **3.2.2 Objectives of the University of Malawi**

The following are the objectives of the University of Malawi:

To advance knowledge and to promote wisdom and understanding by engaging in teaching and research and by making provisions for the dissemination, promotion and preservation of learning; by engaging in such university education and research as is responsive to the needs of Malawi and the whole world; and by offering, within limits of its source, to persons suitably qualified academically and who, in the opinion of the council are able and willing to benefit from the facilities offered by the university, an education of high standard (University of Malawi Act, 1998:254).

Although the University of Malawi outlined these objectives at its inception to respond to the demand for professionally trained workers, Chimombo (2003:414) argues that the fulfilment of this objective is far from ideal, with the 1997 labour survey conducted by the Government of Malawi indicating that 70% of doctors, 50% of surveyors of standard, 33% of architects, 31.5% of accountants, 23% of engineers and 22% of farm managers were not Malawian. This shows that the country is producing a small percentage of human resources of university-level quality or standard.

### **3.2.3 Governance at the University of Malawi**

Since the University of Malawi is a collegiate system, it is administered centrally with the university office coordinating activities for all constituent colleges at university level. The central administration, known as the University Office, is located in Zomba and is headed by the vice-chancellor who is supported by the university registrar, bursars, the university librarian, a finance officer, an estates development officer and the university research coordinator, while each constituent college is headed by a

principal who is assisted by a vice-principal, a registrar, a bursar, deans and a librarian (Chimombo, 2003:416).

Chimombo (2003:416) argues that since the constituent college registrars, bursars and librarians are also representatives of the university registrar, the finance officer and the university librarian respectively, the system creates a dual-loyalty problem as these officers are operationally accountable to their respective principles but look to the University Office for promotion and transfers.

### **3.2.3.1 Officers of the University of Malawi**

Officers of the University of Malawi are as follows:

- The chancellor of the university (the head of state)
- The vice-chancellor
- The pro-vice-chancellor
- The university registrar
- The university librarian (University of Malawi Act, 1998:262).

#### **3.2.3.1.1 The University of Malawi Council**

The University of Malawi Council is the governing body of the university and is responsible for the management and administration of the University of Malawi (The University of Malawi Act, 1998:255). The Council comprises the following:

- The chairperson appointed by the president
- The vice-chancellor
- The principals of the constituent colleges
- The Secretary for Education or his designated representative (ex-officio)
- The Secretary to the Treasury or his designated representative(ex-officio)
- Two members appointed by the chancellor
- One member appointed by the University of Malawi Ex-students Association
- One member appointed by the council from a panel of three persons distinguished in university affairs in Malawi, nominated by the vice-chancellor

- One female member and one male member elected by the University of Malawi Students Union
- Other members not exceeding four co-opted by the Council (University of Malawi Act, 1998:258).

#### **3.2.3.1.2 The University of Malawi Senate**

The University of Malawi Senate has the general responsibility for academic-related activities and it comprises the following:

- The vice-chancellor
- The principals of the constituent colleges
- Deans of faculties
- One member from each faculty
- Co-opted members
- One member elected by the University Students Union (University of Malawi Act, 1998:264).

#### **3.2.4 Enrolment at the University of Malawi**

Enrolment at the University of Malawi has been very elitist. Table 1 below shows the number of students per college at the time of the establishment of the collegiate system in 1967.

**Table 1: Enrolment of first-year students at the University of Malawi in 1967**

<b>College</b>	<b>Number of students</b>
Bunda College	77
Chancellor College	250
Institute of Public Administration	46
The Malawi Polytechnic	228
Soche Hill College	119
<b>Total</b>	<b>720</b>



*Source: Marius (1973:146)*

Table 2 below shows proposed enrolment of first-year students in 2006.

**Table 2: Proposed enrolment of first-year students at the University of Malawi in 2006**

Number of Students			
College	Male	Female	Total
Bunda College	62	53	115
Chancellor College	224	151	375
The Malawi Polytechnic	237	70	307
Kamuzu College of Nursing	23	82	105
The College of Medicine	*	*	*
<b>Total</b>	<b>546</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>902</b>

*\* The College of Medicine accepts students after spending one year studying Bachelor of Science courses at the University of Malawi and equivalent colleges.*

*Source: The University of Malawi: Proposed selection 2006/2007, paper B*

The tables above show that the University of Malawi's capacity to enrol students each year has negligibly expanded from 720 students in 1967 to only 902 in 2006. This negligible growth of enrolment capacity retards the achievement of quality university education for the number of graduates is unrealistically low for Malawi. The trend seriously undermines the Malawian government's broad policy of poverty reduction for it is difficult to do so with very few university graduates. Given that in 1998 Malawi's population was estimated at 9.9 million with an annual growth rate of 2% (Ministry of Education and the National Commission for UNESCO, 2004), the number of students attending university is extremely low.

The major problem is that enrolment is based on bed space available in university hostels, which have very limited capacity. This form of enrolment needs to be revisited if university education is to contribute to the development of the country, let alone to its achieving its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as outlined in the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS).

Hayward and Ncayiyana (2006:4) posit that the principal bottleneck originated with the statutory provision dating back to 1964 that required the University of Malawi to provide free and guaranteed boarding and lodging to all students. Consequently, bed space or dormitory capacity became the determining factor in the number of students that could be admitted. They argue that, although this statutory provision was set aside in 1998, both public universities continue to operate according to this practice. Further, the universities are ill placed to do well on housing and catering services as these are non-core functions of the universities, and inevitably they end up subsidising these services from funds earmarked for investment in academic functions.

Total bed space available for first-year students at the University of Malawi in 2006 was as follows:

**Table 3: Available bed space at the University of Malawi's hostels in 2006**

**Number of Students**

<b>College</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Bunda College	55	67	122
Chancellor College	151	221	372
Kamuzu College of Nursing	82	23	105
The Malawi Polytechnic	70	249	319
<b>Total</b>	<b>358</b>	<b>560</b>	<b>918</b>

*Source: The University of Malawi: Proposed selection 2006/2007, paper B*

Table 3 shows that only 918 students were expected to enrol for first-year courses in all the constituent colleges of the University of Malawi in 2006.

In a bid to increase access to university education, in 2002 the University of Malawi introduced the parallel programme in which apart from students who qualify for bed space (referred to as normal students) other students (referred to as parallel students) are admitted to the university on condition that they look for their own accommodation and food and pay higher fees than the normal students. This arrangement is expensive for most students and it heavily favours the rich Malawian sector. However, it has almost doubled enrolment, especially in Bunda College of Agriculture, Chancellor College and the Malawi Polytechnic.

Table 4 below shows the total number of students (normal and parallel) at the University of Malawi in 2005.

**Table 4: Total enrolment of students (normal plus parallel) at the University of Malawi in 2005**

Number of Students			
College	Male	Female	Total
Bunda College of Agriculture	543	271	814
Chancellor College	1 504	754	2 258
Kamuzu College of Nursing	71	260	331
The Malawi Polytechnic	1 644	496	2 140
The College of Medicine	118	61	179
<b>Total</b>	<b>3 880</b>	<b>1 842</b>	<b>5 722</b>

*Source: The University of Malawi, University Office: Students' enrolment by year and college/ faculty, 2006*

Although the parallel programme has almost doubled enrolment at the University of Malawi, the infrastructure and the number of lecturers have remained almost the same. Obviously the trend has had a negative impact on the quality of university education in that at present most classes are overcrowded while teaching and learning resources are too limited.

Hayward and Ncayiyana (2006:4) posit that the total enrolment at the two public universities in Malawi is about 7 000 in a country with a population of 14 million (compared to, say, Swaziland and Botswana, each with a population of one and a half million and each with public higher education enrolment of about 15 000). They argue that this means that only about one-fourth of potential applicants can be admitted annually from the secondary output of about 4 000 school leavers who qualify for university admission. To engender quality university education that can contribute to economic growth, especially one that can assist at long-term planning for achieving the MDGs, there is a need to expand access to university education in Malawi.

### **3.3 THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MZUZU UNIVERSITY**

The need for a second public university in Malawi, Mzuzu University, was expressed in 1994 owing to the high demand for higher education and the need for an elaborate university education that answers to the needs of the country (Mzuzu University Strategic Plan, 2006:1)

The university was finally established by an Act of Parliament in 1997 as Malawi's second national (public) university in Malawi and admitted the first students to the Faculty of Education in January 1999 (Mzuzu University Strategic Plan, 2006:1).

Mzuzu University is autonomous and independent of the existing collegiate University of Malawi.

#### **3.3.1 Mission Statement of Mzuzu University**

The Mission Statement of Mzuzu University states that the university is to provide quality education, training, research and complementary services to meet the technological, social and economic needs of individuals and communities in Malawi (Mzuzu University Hand Book, 2005-2006:9).

#### **3.3.2 Objectives of Mzuzu University**

The objectives of Mzuzu University are as follows:

- To advance knowledge and to promote wisdom and understanding by engaging in teaching, research and training by making provision for the dissemination, promotion and preservation of learning;
- To engage in such university education, research and training as is responsive to the needs of Malawi, Africa and the whole world;
- To offer an education of high university standard; and
- To provide complementary services to meet the technological, social and economic needs of individuals and communities in Malawi (Mzuzu University Hand Book, 2005-2006:9).

Chimombo (2003:416) notes that Mzuzu University hoped to make a fresh start and thereby avoid some of the problems that existed at the University of Malawi and that it was also expected to encourage and promote excellence in the delivery of higher education in the country. He however argues that it is too early to assess whether or not these objectives have been met.

Mzuzu University has however introduced more courses that are tailored to the needs of Malawi in critical areas such as the environment, health sciences and information sciences.

### **3.3.3 Governance at Mzuzu University**

Mzuzu University follows a slightly different governing system from that of the University of Malawi, mainly in that it is not a collegiate system. This arrangement has avoided the dual-loyalty problem experienced at the University of Malawi.

Mzuzu University operates on a committee basis for decision making on academic and administrative matters (Mzuzu University Strategic Plan, 2006:3).

#### **3.3.3.1 Officers of Mzuzu University**

Officers of Mzuzu University are as follows:

- The chancellor ( the head of state)
- The chairman of the Council
- The vice-chancellor

- The deputy vice-chancellor
- The university registrar
- The finance officer (Mzuzu University Hand Book, 2005-2006:8)

The vice-chancellor is the chief executive of the university and is assisted by the deputy vice-chancellor.

#### **3.3.3.1.1 The Mzuzu University Council**

The Council is the governing body of the university, endowed with powers to make statutes and revise them, lay down policy, approve programmes and establish working procedures governing the organisational life of the university. It also provides and controls the resources required to support both academic activities and the physical development and maintenance of the university (Mzuzu University Hand Book, 2005-2006:10).

It works through the following main committees:

- Executive Council Committee
- Appointments and Promotions Committee
- Finance Committee
- Honorary Degrees Committee
- Committee on Staff Terms and Conditions of Service (Mzuzu University Hand Book, 2005-2006:10)

#### **3.3.3.1.2 The Mzuzu University Senate**

The Senate is endowed with academic authority over Mzuzu University with membership including heads of department and the director of research. The Senate has responsibility for the general control and direction of teaching and research activities, examinations, conferment of degrees and awards of diplomas and certificates. The Senate ensures that the academic standard and quality of teaching are acceptable not only to the university and the nation but also to Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) countries and the worldwide academic community (Mzuzu University Hand Book, 2005-2006: 11).

### **3.3.4 Enrolment at Mzuzu University**

Mzuzu University admitted about 120 students to the Faculty of Education in 1999. Eight years later, it had about 1 023 full-time students, both male and female, enrolled in the faculties of Education, Environmental Science, Health Science and Information Science and Communication (Mzuzu University Strategic Plan 2006: 5).

Although Mzuzu University started with both residential and off-campus students, the number of students enrolled compared to the demand for university education in Malawi is still minimal.

## **3.4 FINANCING OF UNIVERSITIES IN MALAWI**

Public universities in Malawi are autonomous institutions subsidised by the government under a separate budget, independent of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training but reporting to it (Hayward & Ncayiyana 2006:3).

Thus the major funding for Malawian public universities is the government. Funding is crucial and most of the time universities do not get the required amounts for their operations, as shown in Table 5 below. Universities are expected to source for more resources on their own, which presents a very big challenge in running universities in Malawi.

The government has acceded to a nominal fee of 25 000 kwacha (US\$170) per annum at the University of Malawi and 55 000 kwacha (US\$390) at Mzuzu University (Hayward & Ncayiyana, 2006:4)

Hayward and Ncayiyana (2006:4) argue that government funding to universities in Malawi is unpredictable and varies from year to year, is sometimes paid months after it is due and has proved inadequate to cover needs such as maintenance and extension of the physical plant, acquisition of educational equipment and other teaching and learning resources.

Table 5 below shows the funding trend at the University of Malawi from 1990 to 2005.

**Table 5: The University of Malawi (UNIMA) funding from 1999/2000- 2004/2005**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Amount requested by the university (excluding own generated income) in Malawi kwacha (MK)</b>	<b>Amount granted by the government in Malawi kwacha (MK)</b>	<b>Percentage of government funding</b>	<b>Amount generated by the university in Malawi kwacha (MK)</b>	<b>Actual expenditure in Malawi kwacha (MK)</b>
1999/2000	680 000 000	450 000 000	66.18	38 966 869	538 956 661
2000/2001	1 158 134 395	500 000 000	43.17	58 300 722	725 003 699
2001/2002	1 431 496 659	659 529 966	46.07	168 546 789	832 178 691
2002/2003	1 689 072 972	891 804 448	52.99	201 669 095	Not provided
2003/2004	2 393 195 669	1 450 894 821	60.63	+ 303 249 782	1 331 984 105
2004/2005	2 977 251 628	1 932 177 836	64.9	358 162 592	2 290 340 428

*Source: The University of Malawi, University Office Statistics, Annexe 3, 2007*

Mzuzu University financing also shows a similar trend. The shortfalls in funding have affected the running of the two universities heavily, especially in that funding assists in buying teaching and learning aids and carrying out other important administrative activities.

### **3.5 STUDENT LOAN SCHEME**

The Malawian Government has introduced a student loan scheme: the Public Universities Loan Trust run by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training ((Mzuzu University Hand Book, 2005-2006:12-13). Through this Loan Trust most students meet fee demands and stationery requirements.



However, loans do not normally come at the expected time for students and since a good proportion of students apply for the loans, most often the delay causes administrative problems between the student body and the university administration. Moreover, sometimes university student strikes have arisen due to loan delays.

Although the loan scheme is meant for students from poor families, the household survey conducted in 2004 found that the poorest 20% of the population in Malawi was excluded from tertiary education while 85% of the places went to the richest 20% of the population, making the state subsidise students from families that are well-off while the poor do not get access (Hayward & Ncayiyana, 2006:8).

To date the Trust Fund has had no repayment programme in part because it does not have legal persona and consequently lacks authority to enforce repayment, hence the students treat the loans as bursaries, which adds to the cost burden of the state (Hayward & Ncayiyana, 2006:8).

### **3.6 SUMMARY**

This chapter has shown the state of university education in Malawi, detailing the establishment of the two public universities and their mission statements, objectives, governance systems, enrolment and funding levels. The chapter argues for a holistic approach to quality and asserts that apart from the need for having defensible higher education policy frameworks and delineated parameters of quality, there is also a need to increase access to university education in Malawi if the country is to achieve quality university education that can contribute to the achievement of the MDGs as outlined in the MGDS.

The following chapter shall present perceptions of stakeholders and policy documents regarding quality university education in Malawi.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PERSPECTIVES ON QUALITY, RELEVANCE AND POLICY BY STAKEHOLDERS AND FROM POLICY DOCUMENTS IN MALAWI**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Following on the argument for the need for defensible higher education policy frameworks, delineated quality parameters (*fitness for* and *of purpose, value for money* and *transformation*) and proposed expansion of access to university education in Malawi in order to engender quality university education, this chapter aims at presenting the perceptions of *quality, relevance* and *policy* as presented by respondents or stakeholders interviewed and from higher education policy framework documents in Malawi. These views shall be dealt with critically and shall also lead to policy suggestions that shall be part of Chapter Five. The chapter posits that policy document in Malawi such as the PIF have not been critically deliberated on and that university strategic plans do not encourage values of democratic citizenship or deliberative democracy among the university community and especially in pedagogical issues.

#### **4.2 STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE CONCEPT OF QUALITY**

When asked to express their views on the concept of *quality*, most stakeholders presented functional views. Their views have been grouped into major arguments as follows:

##### **4.2.1 Junior academic members of university staff**

Most administrators and academics interviewed link the concept of quality to the level of academic members of staff currently teaching in Malawian universities. They argue that most experienced academics have left the country for other African countries, Europe and America due to poor conditions within Malawi's universities.

They posit that the universities have more junior academic staff members (staff associates<sup>2</sup> and assistant lecturers<sup>3</sup>) than senior lecturers. Staff associates are employed as trainee lecturers and are expected to be sent for higher and further studies after a year. However, due to a shortage of teaching staff, in most constituent colleges of the University of Malawi and at Mzuzu University, staff associates are involved in both full-time teaching and student assessment. Unfortunately, most of the staff associates teach for longer than expected and their chances for further studies are mostly not guaranteed.

Academic staff remains largely junior in terms of academic rank, with only 20% of staff at the University of Malawi and 1% at Mzuzu University holding PhD or equivalent qualifications (Hayward & Ncayiyana, 2006:6).

Without experienced academics, junior academics lack mentoring and consequently do not fully grow in their professional work. Stakeholders think that this situation impacts on quality university education since junior academics lack the necessary skills and knowledge to teach students at university level.

#### **4.2.2 The quality of students who qualify for university courses**

The other concern brought to light by stakeholders is that most students who enrol for university courses are ill prepared for the university-level courses. They argue that even the entrance examinations administered to students before they enter university do not seem to impact much on the quality of students who qualify for university courses. One respondent posited as follows:

If you look at students that we are now selecting from secondary schools and if you compare them with 10 to 15 years ago, there is a marked difference. The current students lack the expected quality. This is a very big challenge for maintaining quality in university. Of course we have tried; we have not lowered our standards to make sure that the graduates we are producing now are the same with the ones we have been producing before. But bringing them to that level is a big challenge.

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<sup>2</sup> Staff associates are trainee lecturers. Mostly, they are employed after achieving a good first degree to understudy experienced academics and later be sent for further studies.

<sup>3</sup> Assistant lecturers are first degree holders with some university teaching experience

The situation demands that universities start offering bridging courses for first-year students, which can be costly where the teaching staff is small. It also calls for a concerted effort to improve schooling at every level, i.e. from basic to university.

#### **4.2.3 External examiners**

For Malawian universities to be on a par with international standards, external examiners are supposed to be invited to assess examinations given to students within universities in Malawi. However, stakeholders argue that for a long time in most colleges of the University of Malawi, due to a lack of resources external examiners have not been involved. In the same vein one academic argues that even if external examiners are invited, Malawian universities pay very little so that external examiners do not make themselves available. Further, stakeholders argue that instead, it is inexperienced academics that seem to be interested in coming to Malawi. One respondent said the following:

External examiners are supposed to be coming every year or every two years but what has been happening is that the university has no funds. For the past four years we have not seen external examiners come here in person to interact with us and to provide the much needed guidance that we need. External examiners are supposed to look at whole programmes. We are trying to resume the system but the challenge is that our rates are very low so we can only attract the inexperienced academics.

This being the case, it is difficult to appreciate developments that are taking place in different fields since involving external examiners is one way of keeping up with international standards.

#### **4.2.4 Lack of resources**

Most stakeholders view the lack of resources in Malawian universities as contributing to poor university education. They mention insufficient resources such as inadequate library books, limited Internet facilities, poor research by academic members of staff, poor teaching and learning materials such as projectors and other. They argue that

lecturers spend most of their time that is reserved for teaching looking for teaching and learning aids. One respondent asserted the following:

Today education demands learning resources which are unfortunately very expensive that our country cannot afford; as a result this has a negative impact on the type of education we offer.

For example, the Mzuzu University Strategic Plan (2006:7) lists the following challenges that Mzuzu University faces: inadequate teaching and learning materials, inadequate teaching staff, lack of teaching space, inadequate library books, limited Internet access, inadequate and poorly resourced science laboratories, lack of reliable transport for activities such as monitoring teaching practicum, inadequate number of specialised academic staff and inadequate number of staff with a PhD, among others.

If universities in Malawi are to engender quality university education, the country needs to provide the necessary resources for student learning.

#### **4.2.5 Curriculum reviews and continuity**

The curriculum for secondary school has changed more often than expected according to stakeholders interviewed. Stakeholders argue that secondary school curriculum changes like, for example, the one that included change from Physical Science to Science and Technology diluted the core science so that students who went to the university could hardly understand the basics of university science courses. One respondent posited as follows:

Curriculum at secondary school is poor; for instance all the students that enrolled at this college (university) who did Integrated Science and Technology instead of Physical Science were all withdrawn on academic grounds for they did not have proper basics for university level science courses.

Another said the following:

The standards have gone down, quality is not impressive, and over the years the tendency to revise curriculum has made students ill prepared to tackle university

courses. For example the split of English language and Literature into two separate optional subjects and the removal of Physical Science for Integrated Science left students totally ill prepared for our university courses.

The curriculum for basic, secondary and primary teacher education is designed by the Malawi Institute of Education (MIE) (Policy and Investment Framework, 2000:39). In order to engender quality university education, this body ought to liaise with the university community on curriculum reviews so that there is proper curriculum continuity from primary and secondary levels to the university level.

#### **4.2.6 Graduates as the end products**

Some stakeholders argued that quality is linked to the type of graduates who finish courses at universities. They argue that university graduates must be relevant to industry. Proponents of this view see quality graduates as those who fit work demands.

This view is problematic for there is a need to balance liberal aspects of the idea of university and vocational orientations as argued in Chapter Two. However, it is vital for Malawi to produce graduates of international quality.

### **4.3 STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE RELEVANCE OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN MALAWI**

Stakeholders gave very varied responses on whether university education is relevant to the needs of Malawians. However, in this section, issues regarding the purposes of higher education were alluded to. The fact that it is difficult to agree on the purposes of higher education in Malawi was clearly seen in stakeholders. Delineating parameters of quality also demands that Malawian education planners should clearly delineate the purposes of university education.

Saint (1992:xii) argues that rising graduate unemployment, inadequate performance on the job and weak research production combine to bring the relevance of universities in Africa under growing scrutiny.

Some respondents argued that the country has not produced enough graduates; hence the university education offered is not relevant. This argument fortifies the need for expanding access to university education in Malawi. Others argued that universities in Malawi ought to introduce courses that address the socio-political economy in order to be relevant.

Respondents revealed that in some institutions there is extensive stakeholder involvement in their curriculum planning. However, this is not the case with some institutions. Involving stakeholders was argued to be one way of responding to the relevance of the education to the country's needs. One respondent said the following:

We do not just introduce a curriculum without demonstrated demand. The demand has to come from stakeholders themselves. First we get requests from stakeholders, and then we make a survey to document the demand and then work together with stakeholders to look at what they are looking for in the curriculum so that we then can see how much practical and theory should go into the course.

What is clear from stakeholders' perceptions is that the concept *relevance* in university education is elusive. Reifying the idea of university to one that is only liberal or responding to market forces is no longer possible. In Malawi what is needed is university education that answers to the different roles of a university as argued in Chapter Two. Such a university should also respond to properly delineated purposes of university education.

#### **4.4 QUALITY AS EXPRESSED IN POLICY DOCUMENTS**

This section discusses quality as expressed in major policy documents: the Policy and Investment Framework (PIF), the National Education Sector Plan (NESP) and the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS). The PIF is a founding document of revitalisation of education policies in Malawi; the NESP is holistic as it draws on Vision 2020, the PIF and the MGDS (NESP, 2006:5). The MGDS outlines quality with emphasis on achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

#### **4.4.1 The Policy and Investment Framework (PIF)**

The PIF spells out the Malawian Government's policy on education in all sectors. Assessing the previous policy frameworks, the PIF states that although significant policy changes have been made in the past decade, they were in most cases partial and aimed at redressing the problems inherited from the past and rarely sought to address the educational challenges of the future (PIF, 2000: vii).

The PIF has four guiding principles that hinge on comprehensive analysis of the education sector, responding to the government's policy on poverty alleviation and addressing the national goals as spelt out in the Vision 2020 document, addressing the main constraints facing the education system in Malawi and paying greatest attention to the basic education sub sector.

Although the PIF claims comprehensive analysis of the education system, its analysis of higher education is sketchy. The PIF overemphasises the basic education sub sector and thus fails to come up with a detailed and realistic analysis of the higher education sector, especially the university.

Even though in its policy proposition the PIF carefully notes that quality education demands the motivation of staff, university-level reforms and strengthening of research and graduate programmes, academic staff is still underpaid and heavily demotivated at the moment as evidenced by the 2006 University of Malawi lecturers strike.

Although the PIF proposed rehabilitation of university physical facilities by the year 2002, nothing has been done by 2007. The same applies to several other proposals made by the PIF in 2000.

There seems to be a lack of commitment largely from the side of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training.



#### **4.4.2 The National Education Sector Plan (NESP)**

The NESP has been developed over almost four years, drawing on Vision 2020, the PIF and the MGDS (NESP, 2006:5)

The plan is structured around three main goals: expanding equitable access, improving quality and relevance of education to reduce dropout and repetition and promote effective learning, and improving governance and management of the system to enable more effective delivery of services (NESP, 2006:6-7).

The NESP now forms the basis of all investment (by the Government of Malawi and all development partners) and development of the sector for the 10-year planning period (NESP, 2006:5)

On equitable access, the objectives of the NESP are to double enrolment over the next five years, focussing on critical academic areas, and to improve the infrastructure of the University of Malawi and Mzuzu University, focussing on science laboratories and ICT as well as resolving maintenance backlogs on other facilities. A further objective is to develop policies designed to encourage private providers in line with minimum quality requirements (NESP, 2006:11)

The NESP, however, is not clear on what these minimum quality requirements are or would be. This signifies the need for delineated quality parameters that would guide quality levels to be achieved.

In terms of relevance and quality, the NESP proposes urgent and significant investments to upgrade teaching and learning infrastructure, enhance funding to increase qualifications, especially the number of PhDs, establish a National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) to monitor quality, oversee accreditation and advise the government on higher education policy and finally to establish a semi-autonomous accreditation and quality assurance agency under the supervision of the NCHE (NESP, 2006:11-12)

Although the NESP rightly sees the need for training university lecturers, which is urgent as argued in Chapter Three, top priority for the policy should be to support retention of the academic staff. Thus the most important aspect would be to find proper and realistic ways to curb the brain drain in Malawi.

On governance and management, the NESP proposes preparing and putting in place a Higher Education Act that articulates the values and goals of Malawian higher education, creates and defines its governance and, generally, establishes an NCHE for accreditation and regulation of the system for greater efficiency and effectiveness in its public purposes. Further, universities are called to review governance and management and strengthen oversight, transparency and accountability (NESP, 2006:12).

Putting in place the Higher Education Act is important for establishing defensible higher education policy frameworks to engender quality university education in Malawi. The act would provide an elaborate framework within which the NCHE would operate. However, it would be more appropriate to study how different systems work in different countries. In Chapter Two, the South African system has been discussed for this purpose.

#### **4.4.3 The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy**

The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) is the overarching operational medium-term strategy for Malawi to attain the nation's Vision 2020 (MGDS:iii) The policy maintains a balance between the productive and social sectors of the economy in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that are also long-term development aspirations for Malawi (MGDS:iii).

The MGDS asserts that the MDGs are important to Malawi and the goals are as follows:

- **Poverty:** The goal is to decrease poverty by 8% through a combination of economic growth, economic empowerment and food security.

- **Hunger:** The goal is to directly decrease the proportion of the population who suffer from hunger and to improve their nutritional status.
- **Education:** The goal is to increase enrolment to 25% and reduce the dropout rate to 5% by 2012.
- **Gender:** The goal is to integrate targeted programmes for women to enable them to be part of economic growth, such as targeted programmes for business development and micro-finance.
- **Child mortality:** The goal is to improve access to essential health care services.
- **Maternal mortality:** The goal is to improve antenatal care and basic emergency obstetric care.
- **HIV and AIDS:** The goal is to reduce the prevalence and incidence of HIV and AIDS and decrease the negative impact of HIV and AIDS on people living with HIV and AIDS and to reduce the economic and social consequences for those who care for people living with HIV and AIDS.
- **Malaria:** The goal is to improve essential health care services.
- **Environmental sustainability:** The goal is to consider environmental sustainability in forestry resources and fisheries, to provide enforcement of and education on environmental standards and to identify areas such as eco-tourism which have a positive spillover effect on economic sustainability.
- **Access to water:** The goal is to provide access to clean water and sanitation in line with the MDGs (MGDS:5-6).

The MGDS therefore embraces quality from an economic perspective. It envisages that economic growth will generate sustainable means for the provision for basic human needs to enable Malawi to achieve the MDGs.

However according to the 2003 Millennium Development Goals Report on Malawi progress in the implementation of the goals is in most cases out of track. The report shows that achieving most of the goals by 2015 shall be problematic. Incidence of poverty in Malawi was estimated at 65.3 percent affecting nearly 6.3 million people according to the 1997/1998 Integrated Household Survey. This meant that in order to halve poverty by 2015 the poverty incidence should decline by 2 percent per annum. The report explains that although enrolment of primary school children grew with the introduction of the Free Primary Education, these were quickly negated by high drop-out rates citing poverty and low value attached to education as major causes. The report mentions that gender equality and empowerment of women is still a major problem in Malawi and that the key challenge is to transform the fundamental socio-cultural factors that create and perpetuate gender inequalities. The report however mentions that the reduction of under-five mortality rate is on track while maternal mortality rate has increased by 80 percent since 1992. The report shows that although HIV/AIDS prevalence remained relatively stable, new infections are still occurring at a rate of about 80, 000 people per year. The report argues that halving the number of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water could probably be reached by 2015.

I argue that quality university education eventually ought to be manifested by the country's ability to achieve the MDGs and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) threefold initiative: to promote accelerated growth and sustainable development, eradicate widespread poverty and halt the marginalisation of Africa in the globalisation process (Diescho, 2002:13-14).

#### **4.5 STAKEHOLDERS' VIEWS ON HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY FRAMEWORKS**

Although the government has come up with policy frameworks that have been referred to in preceding sections, most stakeholders interviewed are ignorant about these documents. For example, most academics and university administrators are not aware of the PIF and the NESP. It seems there is a lack of proper linkage between higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training,

hence there is no proper channel for policy communication. The type of policy making is extremely top down and is problematic given that policy intentions are normally not implemented linearly.

The relationship between the public universities and the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training is opaque and ill-defined. The position officially dedicated to higher education within the ministry, the Directorate of Higher Education, remains vacant. This leaves the universities feeling ignored and the government deprived of the leverage it would need to steer higher education for the public good (Hayward & Ncayiyana, 2006:5)

Most stakeholders called for an urgent establishment of a Higher Education Council to monitor higher education. It is evident that higher education policy frameworks in Malawi are not properly communicated to the intended targets, are not defensible and lack definitive quality parameters.

#### **4.6 VALUES OF DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY**

Although there may be different ways of looking at deliberative democracy, most proponents of deliberative democracy agree that the notion includes collective decisions making with the participation of all that will be affected or their representatives and also that decision making is by means of arguments offered *by* and *to* participants who are committed to values of rationality and impartiality (Elster, 1999:8)

Miller (2000:3) argues that a democratic system is deliberative to the extent that the decisions it reaches reflect open discussion among the participants, with people ready to listen to the views and consider the interests of others, and modify their own opinions accordingly.

Deliberative democracy therefore demands citizens to participate in public debate in making decisions rationally. Taylor (1985:137 & 142) presents four ideas about rationality which illustrate the use of rationality. These are: that rational understanding is linked to articulation; that consistency is a necessary condition for

rationality; that there is a close connection between understanding the order of things and being in “attunement with it” (following the discourse) and that relevant arguments need to be advanced in an inter-subjective process of rational deliberation.

Although policy frameworks such as PIF, NESP and MGDS are a result of extensive consultation, most of it was done at ministerial levels and was mostly report based not deliberative. The fact that most university academics are not aware of the PIF founding document reveals that that the policy frameworks have not be debated upon seriously. There is a need for deliberating on these frameworks at university and national levels so that they engender quality university education.

At Institutional levels both the strategic plans of the two public universities, lack values of deliberative democracy. Although the plans are exhaustive in terms of analysis of problems faced by the university community (especially the UNIMA strategic plan) the plans have sidelined the major activity of universities i.e. to engage with student teaching in a deliberative manner. Moreover apart from the committees that helped in the formation of the plans the plans have not been presented to the wider university community for critique.

I argue that universities in Malawi need to create an environment that allows for students and staff to freely present their arguments while aware that their views can be challenged and therefore be ready to listen to other people who are also able to give reasonable arguments on all matters of academic life.

Values of deliberative democracy require free and equal citizens to justify decisions in a process in which they give one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible with the aim of reaching conclusions that are binding in the present but open to challenge in the future (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004:7)

The documents need to be deliberated on since deliberation aims at promoting the legitimacy of collective decisions, encouraging public spirited perspectives on public issues, promoting mutually respectful purposes of decision making and correcting mistakes that could have arisen in the process of decision making (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004:10-12).

## **4.7 SUMMARY**

This chapter has discussed the perceptions of stakeholders on quality, relevance and policy frameworks as reflected in policy documents. Stakeholders see quality in terms of the quality of lecturers, the quality of students who enrol in universities, the involvement of external examiners, the availability of resources, curriculum reviews and continuity and the quality of graduates. The issue of relevance elicited very varied responses, most of which reveal the problem of purposes of higher education. The chapter has also discussed quality as reflected in the three major policy documents in Malawi: the PIF, which looks at a holistic approach to quality, the NESP, which redefines the PIF, and the MGDS, which defines quality in line with achieving the MDGs. The chapter argues for deliberative policy making both nationally and at institutional levels.

The following chapter is a summary and a critique that generally shows that Malawian higher education policy frameworks are inadequate to engender quality university education and that consequently this will retard the country's ability to achieve the MDGs and the NEPAD initiatives. The chapter proposes several policy recommendations both to the government and universities.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CAN HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY FRAMEWORKS ENGENDER QUALITY HIGHER EDUCATION IN MALAWIAN UNIVERSITIES?**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

Throughout, I have argued that in order to engender quality university education in Malawi, quality ought to be the corollary of defensible higher education policy frameworks, policy documents need to delineate quality parameters, the universities need to increase access, the values of deliberative democracy ought to be given primacy and quality university education ought to assist the country in alleviating poverty by achieving the MDGs and the NEPAD initiatives.

While this chapter is a summary it also gives a critique and offers pathways for restructuring university education in Malawi to engender quality university education. The chapter asserts that higher education policy frameworks are inadequate for engendering quality higher education in Malawian universities.

#### **5.2 NEED FOR DEFENSIBLE HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY FRAMEWORKS IN MALAWI**

As argued in the preceding chapters, higher education policy frameworks in Malawi are inadequate for engendering quality university education. Currently, public policy to regulate higher education is astonishingly scant, leaving the universities with a level of both formal and default autonomy bordering on benign neglect (Hayward & Ncayiyana, 2006:5).

Since higher education policy frameworks are required to serve as basis for decision making for achieving quality university education, the inadequacy of higher education policy frameworks in Malawi has created a gap between the higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training that eventually affects policy decisions at different educational levels.



Although the PIF envisaged an education act to be completed by December 2000, the act is still not in place by 2007. Currently, the largest of the private universities, the University of Livingstonia, has not yet been recognised by the government because of a lack of regulatory mechanisms for higher education institutions (NESP, 2006:28). It is the same with all the other private universities that are mushrooming in the country.

As proposed by the PIF and NESP, there is an urgent need for a National Council on Higher Education that could provide informed and strategic advice on higher education policy to the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training.

Fundamentally, to coordinate educational matters preceding a National Council on Higher Education, there is a need for the establishment of a National Qualifications Framework concerned with activities that pertain to quality education in Malawi and the Malawian Qualifications Act that could oversee the National Qualifications Framework and formulate policies and criteria for the registration, accreditation and auditing of educational bodies.

The National Council on Higher Education then would be an independent statutory body that would comply with the Malawian Qualifications Act and would be endowed with powers to provide advice to the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training. The Council would then have two committees: one to monitor and evaluate policy achievements in higher education and the other to establish and promote quality assurance, audit the quality assurance mechanism and accredit higher education programmes.

Currently, according to the findings of this research, the government uses the Credentials and Evaluation Committee to evaluate private universities. The Committee comprises officers from the University of Malawi, the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training and other nonpublic organisations. However, according to respondents, this committee was instituted in the 1980s to evaluate the qualifications of people willing to work in Malawi but holding qualifications from other countries. Thus the committee needs restructuring under a proper accreditation committee. The research findings further reveal that there seems to be another committee that has emerged from the university community, trying to carry out a

similar activity. The problem could be curbed by instituting the coordinated system that I have proposed.

Furthermore, like in many countries including South Africa as shown in Chapter Two, Malawian universities require quality promotion units at university level that could establish proper linkages between individual universities and the higher education policy frameworks nationally in order to engender quality university education.

### **5.3 NEED FOR PROPERLY DELINEATED QUALITY PARAMETERS**

Although university education started in 1965 in Malawi it has no direction as to what level of quality ought to be achieved. With a lack of proper relationship between the Ministry of Education and the universities, quality is chiefly left in the hands of the universities and consequently there is no monitoring and feedback on what is happening in Malawian universities. This is, of course, exacerbated by the lack of defensible higher education policy frameworks. It is necessary to reiterate that quality is a receding horizon in that there are no static, acceptable norms of performance but if quality is to be improved, it must be defined with enough specificity so that its attributes are at least suggested, if not clearly delineated. Furthermore, quality improvement is inexorably bound up with assessment and feedback.

Having analysed the situation in Malawi, I have proposed the following quality parameters: fitness *for* and *of* purpose, value for money and transformation.

Quality as fitness *for* purpose demands that the country establishes the purposes of higher education in a deliberative manner so that there is room for change in the future, depending on changing contexts that affect higher education. The country should earnestly strive to achieve these goals. Fitness *of* purpose demands that the purposes delineated should be morally right in that they should not be discriminatory. Achieving the purposes set is a step to quality university education.

Quality as value for money would assist Malawian universities in being accountable to the government, students and citizens. The system will allow for transparency which is important for designing courses that are relevant to the nation.

The third parameter is transformation. In this regard I propose realistic pedagogical changes at university level in Malawi where students experience change in their intellectual and human growth. This includes proper moderation of students' examinations, transparency and fairness toward students' work. This will allow for critical classroom pedagogy and deliberative modes of teaching in which the student's voice is important and teaching is guided by rationality.

The need to delineate quality parameters is exacerbated by the fact that at the moment there are no university self-monitoring performance systems and throughputs and dropout rates are not being monitored, documented and acted upon in Malawian universities (Hayward & Ncayiyana 2006:5).

#### **5.4 NEED FOR INCREASED ACCESS TO UNIVERSITY EDUCATION**

As shown in Chapter Three, low access to university education poses a very big challenge to quality higher education in Malawian universities. Low access to university education translates into limited human resources and expertise needed for development. Thus Malawi needs to increase access to university education if it is to achieve its development goal of poverty alleviation.

To expand access the country needs to review its university accommodation policy so that intake does not depend on available bed space. In this area off-campus modes of enrolment should be encouraged and user fees be charged accordingly. Universities need to expand courses so as to enrol as many students as possible from those who qualify for university education.

The University of Malawi should expand its parallel students programme while Mzuzu University should start a similar programme. However, for the parallel programmes to contribute to quality university education, universities need to expand teaching and learning facilities and the teaching staff to avoid congestion of students as currently seems to be the case with the University of Malawi.

It is encouraging to note that Mzuzu University has embarked on a distance learning programme. Distance learning could assist the country greatly in educating Malawians. However, the programme calls for good governance and follow-up mechanisms; otherwise the programme may produce poor graduates. I propose that Mzuzu University should collaborate with other institutions like the University of Malawi for expertise and capacity.

Furthermore through enabling defensible higher education policy frameworks, private providers of higher education should be encouraged.

## **5.5 NEED FOR VALUES OF DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY**

Deliberative policy making at national levels is vital, as I have shown in Chapter Four.

Having argued for the need for deliberative democracy in policy making in Chapter Four, I argue that given the lack of deliberative modes of teaching in Malawian universities, as reflected in the universities' strategic plans, Burbules's ideas (1993) offer an example of deliberation appropriate for the university community in Malawi.

Thus I further advance my argument, using Burbules's ideas of a substantive conception of 'reasonableness' which he describes as referring to the dispositions and capacities of a certain kind of person, a person who is related in specific contexts to other persons, not obliged to follow formal rules and procedures of thought. He advances four tenets/virtues: *being objective, accepting fallibilism, embracing pragmatism and exercising judgment* (Burbules, 1993). I argue that these tenets might support both lecturers and students in Malawian universities in cultivating a critical spirit needed for quality university education.

Being objective for Burbules requires an attitude of tolerance (the capacity to regard alternative positions without a rush to judgment) and acceptance of plurality (having a regard for other views). I argue that academics, university administrators and students need to listen to many voices in order to make informed decisions on a range of academic-related decisions and choices rationally. Teaching modelled on this objective will demand exploring rational input from students and among students.

This will guard against the telling or lecture method that currently seems to characterise teaching in Malawian universities.

Burbules's argument that rationality accepts fallibility is important in a setup like public universities in Malawi where most academics do not share research findings or engage with one another deliberatively. Burbules argues that this virtue requires us to make certain commitments or take certain risks that run the risk of error. Furthermore, he mentions that purposely hiding behind obscurantism, withholding commitment or playing it safe by only conforming to the conventional and obvious are all ways of avoiding mistakes and, ultimately, of avoiding learning and change. More so, he holds that this virtue requires a capacity to recognise that one may be wrong, which consequently invites the capacity for reflection. To cultivate a critical mind this virtue is paramount in that academics, administrators and students alike are called to deliberate on all issues affecting academic life, realising that all can make mistakes and that mistakes may be exposed through deliberation, thus leading to learning and relearning.

The other tenet that he argues for is that of embracing a pragmatic approach. By pragmatism, he refers to a belief in the importance of practical problems in driving the process of intellectual, moral and political development. He argues that such an outlook is sensitive to the particulars of given contexts and the variety of human needs and purposes. However, most important is to cultivate a person who can approach present problems with an open mind, willingness and the capacity to adapt and persist in the face of initial failure. Societies therefore need not exaggerate success and accept failure as inevitable condition for growth. University communities are societies in which reflexivity ought to be supported and thus academics, administrators and students alike are invited to put forward their ideas and reshape them deliberatively, whether in a class situation or while undertaking extracurricular activities.

Lastly, Burbules argues for the exercise of rational judgment. This extends to knowing when to do what and not depending on the situation. He argues that part of reasonableness is a capacity for prudence and moderation, even in the exercise of reason itself. Exercising rational judgment therefore is not an individual process; it extends to the community within which we are moulded. I argue that academics,

administrators and students ought to view each other as partners in reasoning to achieve quality university education in Malawi.

Broadly, I argue that universities should provide the proper environment for deliberative engagement in all their endeavours.

## **5.6 NEED FOR POLICY COMMUNICATION**

Policy communication is vital for planning. As discussed earlier, currently, the higher education sector suffers from a lack of proper policy communication to the intended public. Since there is no organised body responsible for planning, reviewing, advocacy or facilitation for higher education nationally, there is no obvious point of entry at the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training.

Communicating policy is vital since for policy to be successfully implemented there is a need to involve stakeholders, to engage with the political and cultural context and to envisage resource availability. I have argued in Chapter One that education policy is strategic, thus it requires several people at different levels for its implementation. Policies therefore need to be communicated properly and be seriously deliberated on for their successful implementation.

## **5.7 NEED FOR CURRICULUM CONTINUATION**

Curriculum is central for Malawi to achieve quality university education. This research has revealed that there is no curriculum continuity from the secondary school to university-level courses.

The lack of curriculum continuity contributes to the declining standards of students that enrol in Malawian universities since students can hardly connect the knowledge base they have to the one required by the university.

Malawian universities need to work with the Malawi Institute of Education that formulates curricula for the primary and secondary education sectors to find ways of providing for a coordinated education system in terms of curricula. The situation

underscores the importance of establishing the qualifications framework discussed earlier.

There is a need for Malawian universities to start offering bridging courses where necessary in order to bring students to the required level before teaching university-level courses. More so, academics need to adhere to basic pedagogical principles such as teaching from the known or familiar to the unknown, so that concepts are introduced to students gradually and logically.

## **5.8 NEED FOR RESOURCES AND FUNDING**

The Malawian Government should prioritise funding to the universities. University funding should not be unpredictable and should be paid at required times. There should be enough funding to cover such needs as maintenance and extension of the physical plant and acquisition of educational equipment and other teaching and learning resources. However, this requires a well-established endowment fund and a transparent agreed-upon funding policy that ought to be adhered to at all times.

While asking the government to increase funding, universities should also increase their resource base and improve financial management. This could be done through increased short courses, research and publications by academics, maintaining cost-sharing measures and making sure that only the needy students get government subsidies, among other measures. The donor community could be lobbied to fund specialist courses that answer to the needs of the country.

## **5.9 NEED FOR ELABORATE GOVERNANCE SYSTEM**

Governance is vital for the running of universities. To avoid problems that arise from the collegiate structure at the University of Malawi, the government needs to institute legislation to promote the decentralisation of public university administration. According to the PIF, the government was supposed to amend the University Act by 2001 to allow constituent colleges of the University Malawi independent status (PIF, 2000:23).

At the planning stage of Mzuzu University's establishment the intention was to have an autonomous institution with its own administrative structure different from the University of Malawi and with a more participative approach to policy making (Mtegha & Nur-Awaleh, 2005:37). However, as Mtegha and Nur-Awaleh (2005:47) note, there is a lack of transformational leadership and the environment at the university is not conducive to employees' satisfaction while collaboration is minimal and the communication channel is one way (from administrators to the faculties). Furthermore, Mtegha and Nur-Awaleh (2005:47) posit that at Mzuzu University there is a culture of silence and confidentiality of information which means that most of the vital information is kept away from the faculty and staff which defeats the intended participative governance envisaged at the inception of the university.

To achieve participative policy making, the public universities need to enhance communication among administrators, academics and students on all issues that affect academic life, such as resource allocation and others. Mtegha and Nur-Awaleh (2005:999) further argue that for universities to achieve participative governance there should be data for decision making, which includes data on teaching, student achievement, research performance, institutional financial status and others.

However, for both public universities in Malawi, there is a need for a more academic-oriented governance system. Academic programmes and related activities need to be given priority in order to engender quality university education.

Moreover, there is a need to privatise the noncore functions of the universities, as I have argued in Chapter Three, to allow for proper academic governance that should allow for transparency and accountability in order to engender quality university education.

## **5.10 PROBLEMS OF ACHIEVING THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND NEPAD INITIATIVES**

I reiterate my argument that unless the university sector in Malawi devises defensible policy frameworks, delineates quality parameters, increases access to university education and advances the values of deliberative or discursive democracy in



propelling policies both at national and institutional levels, the country will not achieve quality university education and eventually will fail to alleviate poverty by achieving the MDGs and NEPAD initiatives.

The MDGs are targets set by the international community aimed at achieving the following goals: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and develop a global partnership for development (UNESCO, 2005).

Given that progress in the implementation of the MDGs is in most cases off track in Malawi, as I have shown in Chapter Four, I argue that Malawi needs several strategies such as well-planned civic education programmes to increase awareness of achieving most of the goals outlined above, detailed informed research on why some problems such as gender inequality still persist, proper policies and planning for the achievement of all the goals, knowledge and skills for evaluation and good public governance, among others. However, all these are realistically possible only when a country has the necessary intellectual capacity or appropriate human resources. Thus I argue that achieving the MDGs will be problematic given the limited number of quality graduates.

The NEPAD is Africa's response to achieving the MDGs through proper coordination of all African leaders and their countries. Diescho (2002) explains that the NEPAD outlined a number of pillars on which the success of its initiatives rests, namely creating conditions of sustainable development, which includes achieving peace, security, democracy and political governance initiatives; working on sectoral priorities, which includes bridging the infrastructure gap and human resources development; and mobilising Africa's resources, which includes capital flows and market access initiatives ((Diescho, 2002:14-15).

The NEPAD has stated four outcomes:

- economic growth and development and increased employment;
- reduction in poverty and inequity;

- diversification of productive activities, enhanced international competitiveness and increased exports; and
- increased African integration.

Since the NEPAD depends on African expertise to achieve its goals, I argue that the goals need a properly educated community to coordinate them. Without educated human resources Malawi will suffer from a lack of expertise and as a result most developmental efforts will be hampered. Eventually the situation may prevent the country from forming the proper partnerships needed for the achievement of the NEPAD goals.

## **5.11 SUMMARY**

In this chapter, I have shown that higher education policy frameworks are inadequate for engendering quality higher education in Malawian universities. I have argued that unless the higher education sector devises defensible higher education policy frameworks, policy documents delineate quality parameters, universities increase access to education and the values of deliberative democracy are enshrined in policy making both at national and institutional levels, higher education policy frameworks will not engender quality higher education in Malawian universities. Without quality university education, the country will fail to achieve the MDGs and NEPAD initiatives and thus retard the broad government policy goal of poverty alleviation. Simultaneously, I have made several other policy proposals to the government and universities.

In conclusion I assert that deliberative policy making could be pursued to critically engage with policy making in Malawi. Deliberation will help in eliminating distortions within the policy process both at governmental and institutional levels and eventually provide for quality university education in Malawian universities.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **REFLECTION ON MY JOURNEY THROUGH THIS THESIS**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

This thesis is part of a two-year MEd (Education Policy Studies) which is divided into one year of coursework and one year of mini-thesis work. The course is interdisciplinary, comprising Philosophy of Education Leadership and Policy; Sociology of Education Policy; Comparative and International Education Studies; Research for Education Policy Studies; and Education Management, Leadership and Policy. The comprehensive coursework assisted me in engaging critically with different readings in individual subjects and to connect them as lenses for policy analysis. The coursework broke the ground for my research thesis.

Thus this thesis, which is an analysis and a critique of higher education policy making in Malawi, draws strongly on all the subjects studied in my first-year coursework.

The reason for this chapter is to reflect on major areas in Education Policy Studies that have enabled my journey through this thesis. It has been a challenging journey of academic and professional growth.

#### **6.2 RESEARCH IN EDUCATION POLICY STUDIES**

To be able to write this thesis, I was introduced to research methods and methodologies or metatheories. Through Philosophy of Educational Research I followed the following topics: different and competing educational research traditions (from positivist to postpositivist inquiry), methods most commonly used in Philosophy of Education, pragmatism and educational research and from critique to deconstruction. These topics were extensive and introduced me to the works of Burbules and Biesta (2003), Burbules and Peters (2004), Harding (1987), Pring (2000), Biesta (1998), Burbules and Phillips (2000), Waghid (2002), Higgs (1995 & 1998) and many others.

Engaging critically with these readings and being supported by class work assisted me in understanding the difference between methods and methodology. Before, I used to use the words *method* and *methodology* interchangeably, but now I am able to recognise that methods are techniques for data gathering while methodologies are broad theories or frameworks that guide research. Thus while research methodologies can be framed in positivist, interpretivist and critical theoretical terms, among others, data can be gathered through questionnaires, interviews and other techniques.

This enabled me to discover that my research interests lie mostly in critical education theory, especially because of its change ‘promise’. In Malawi, policy making needs serious overhauling and critical education theory will continue to inform policy making at all levels.

This theme also connected very well with the discussions in Sociology of Education Policy. Here the role of policy research was among the areas explored. I have learnt that policy research does not automatically get accepted by governments for several reasons and therefore the need for policy critique other than policy advice is vital. I was introduced to the works of Jansen (2002, 2003), McLaughlin (2000), Nzimande (2002), Kallaway (2002), Pampallis (2002) and many others.

### **6.3 THE CHALLENGES OF DELIBERATIVE POLICY MAKING**

The coursework invited me to reflect on the importance of deliberative policy making. The benefits of deliberation are immense. This theme introduced me to the works of Habermas (1996), Enslin, Pendlebury and Tjiattas (2001), Altman (2004), Young (1989), Nussbaum (2001) Green (1995), Miller (2000), Gutmann and Thompson (2004) and many others.

This was the first time I was introduced to democratic citizenship education. As an academic, engaging with these readings made me realise the importance of deliberative democracy in the classroom, at my workplace (Mzuzu University) and for policy making at national level. I began to see how I could best organise my teaching at Mzuzu University to engender deliberation to achieve quality education through rationality. I began to see the gaps among academics at Mzuzu University and

probably most educational institutions in Malawi where lecturers do not engage with each other deliberatively. Burbules's work *Rethinking Rationality: On Learning to be Reasonable* invited me to think about how academics at Mzuzu University could learn to be rational through deliberation and critically engaging with each other in research and other activities. Furthermore, I began to see how university governance could benefit from rationality through deliberation.

I realised the importance of deliberative policy making at national level in Malawi. Noting that policy making is chiefly top down in Malawi, in this thesis I have argued for deliberative policy making both at national and institutional levels if policy frameworks are to engender quality university education.

#### **6.4 CONTEXT AND POLICY BORROWING IN EDUCATION POLICY STUDIES**

One of the major aspects in Education Policy Studies is the understanding of context. The coursework provided me with an opportunity to read Broadfoot (2000), Le Matais (2000), King (2000), Tikly (2004), Hans (1949, 1967) Meuret, Duru-Berat and Marie (2003) Goldstein (2004) and many others. Mostly, these readings offer comparative education policy making. I have learnt the importance of policy borrowing and the dangers of policy generalisations. Most comparative writers deplore generalisations of policies that are supported by the positivistic metatheory that assumes that policies can work in the same way everywhere. Thus in policy borrowing, context ought to be seriously considered.

Malawi will continue to benefit from policy borrowing. However, it will be important for education policy makers to understand the country's problems thoroughly before borrowing policies. As Broadfoot (2003:275) rightly argues, there can be no question of 'one size fits all' for education in the twenty-first century.

This research has presented policy models from Europe and South Africa as a way of learning from what is happening elsewhere so as to understand our situation better and not to copy or borrow blindly. After all, learning from others invites us to critique our own practice thus making the familiar strange.

## **6.5 LEADING IN EDUCATION SETTINGS AND THE POLICY CHALLENGE**

Educational leadership has changed much in recent years. Since the Education Reform Act of 1988 in England, leading in education institutions has changed significantly. Studying the changes that have taken place from modern to postmodern views assisted me in seeing that leading is a complex activity. This course introduced me to authors such as Berkhout (2005), Lingard and Christie (2003), Gunter (2003 & 2004), Peter and Hunter (2002), Lauglo (1995), Naidoo (2002) Ball (1990, 1997, 2006) Weiss (1995) and many others.

This reflection assisted me in conceiving institutional leadership that is guided by reflexivity, strives at attaining moral values such as democratic values, advances concerns that reflect on the whole education system and propels collective decision making. In general, it assisted me in seeing how policy needs to be implemented within democratic transformation.

In this research I have emphasised the need for deliberative governance in Malawian universities.

## **6.6 PAPER PRESENTATIONS AND ACADEMIC WRITING**

The coursework provided me with a chance to make presentations both at Stellenbosch University and elsewhere. These moments were vital in assisting me in refining my work, including the research proposal for this thesis.

The emphasis put on the course in academic writing has helped me to develop my writing skills greatly. Throughout the year I remembered the long, demanding essays that I had to write, especially for Professor Berkhout's courses, organising the portfolio, the seven-hour examination and other demands. I hope to continue growing in this area for it is very challenging. As an academic, I am required to write and publish and this can only be done by a continued effort to write. I am conscious of what Professor Berkhout told me repeatedly: that claims must be substantiated in a good essay or paper. Thus I have tried to substantiate all my claims in this thesis.

Going through my thesis, Professor Yusef Waghid, my supervisor, has been quite influential in assisting me in developing my writing skills. He has several times recommended practical ways for me to improve my writing skills.

The growth in writing skills has not only assisted me in writing this research paper but also in being invited for paper presentations. Apart from paper presentations at South African universities (such as Stellenbosch, Western Cape, and Cape Peninsula), I have also presented a paper, *Defining Quality University Education in African Universities within the Bologna Process*, at an international conference in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Besides, my other abstract, *Towards a Pedagogy of Values in Teacher Education in Africa*, also passed for a paper presentation at an international conference on Distance and Teacher Training in Africa at Makerere University in Uganda. Furthermore, I am expected to present other papers at various conferences in South Africa and other countries.

Most importantly, one of my papers has been accepted for publication in the *European Education Review* in early 2008. This will be my first publication and I look forward to it. As an academic, I hope to write more papers for publication throughout my stay at Stellenbosch and when I return to Malawi.

## **6.7 MY MOST IMPORTANT EVENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY**

As an academic my two most important moments were my involvement in teaching the Comparative and International Education course and receiving the research funds from the National Research Foundation (NRF).

I was involved in teaching Comparative and International Education to distance education students. The programme involves video interaction with students from different parts of South Africa. At first, it was very challenging for me but in time I got used to it and enjoyed sharing with my fellow students. Presenting programmes with Professor Berkhout was academically interesting for we could sometimes disagree and indeed show students that learning is not about agreeing with your professors every time; it is sometimes about having your own voice that could be

substantiated. In this way we assisted students in building their own voices to critically engage with Comparative and International Education. It was a great opportunity for me to learn from fellow students and from my lecturers, both Prof. Berkhout and Dr Taylor. It assisted me in understanding the role of Comparative and International Education in Education Policy Studies and helped me to see how comparative education could be used in my own research. Thus in this research I have presented quality assurance models from Europe and South Africa, for the sake of comparison and learning. I have discovered that for me learning becomes more meaningful if done comparatively.

To be awarded NRF funds was not easy. All foreign students studying at South African universities were eligible to apply. Selection depended on the quality of the abstracts sent in. I sent my proposal for this research and only eight of us at Stellenbosch University qualified for the R40 000 award. The award was timely for my research that involved travelling long distances in Malawi. This gave me an opportunity to work on my research successfully.

## **6.8 OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

This research has revealed that higher education policy making in Malawi lacks planning and deliberation. Furthermore, educational policies need to be aligned to developmental frameworks, especially in that most African governments' policies strive to alleviate poverty. National policies and the NEPAD are cases in point. I hope that deliberative democracy and development issues will remain among urgent areas of research in education policy studies in Malawi and the entire Africa for some time.

## **6.9 SUMMARY**

This chapter has reflected on my professional journey in conducting this research. I have outlined selected moments of learning that have taken place that were important for my professional and academic growth. (It is difficult to exhaust all of them)

Studying at Stellenbosch University has been both challenging and fulfilling. At the beginning the whole process of going through the course seemed fuzzy. The level of



engagement was critical but in time the course drew me successfully into critical engagement (which is an unending endeavour for me).

The MEd (Education Policy Studies) has assisted me in understanding the field of education policy in a holistic manner. I can now draw freely on Philosophy, Sociology, Management and Comparative and International Education as lenses for analysing education policy. The course has assisted me in becoming analytical in curriculum, leadership and governance, research, diversity, educational change, policy etc. I hope to continue growing in the field and in my own way contribute to better education policy making in Malawi and the world.

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